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A POCKETFUL OF POSES

BY

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A POCKETFUL OF POSES. I

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To CHARLES

“As for you, my dear Charles, I do not even ask you to like this tale.”—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

CONTENTS

PART I: *Mrs. Trent's House*

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|--|------|
| I MARIGOLD | 11 |
| II POSING FOR DONALD | 18 |
| III TEA IN THE DRAWING ROOM | 26 |
| IV UNDER THE MOON | 32 |
| V MUDDLE | 45 |
| VI MARIGOLD PUTS ON HER WEDDING-GOWN AND TAKES IT OFF AGAIN | 62 |
| VII PANIC | 86 |

PART II: *Mrs. Boynton's House*

| | |
|--|-----|
| VIII POSING FOR MRS. BOYNTON | 105 |
| IX COLLAPSE | 122 |
| X GEORGE | 134 |
| XI KNITTING, SERVANTS, SALVIA, AND THE NEIGHBOURS | 153 |
| XII PROPOSAL | 166 |
| XIII CONSEQUENCES | 181 |
| XIV STORMY NIGHT | 193 |
| XV BLUE SKY AND THE RECTORY PARLOUR . | 204 |

PART III: *Mrs. Bellamy's House*

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XVI MRS. BOYNTON, MRS. CAMPBELL, MRS. MEARS, THE MISSES HALL, MRS. MARSHALL, MRS. MASON, MISS PATTERSON, AND MISS QUACKENBUSH GIVE THEIR OPINIONS | 221 |
| XVII ECSTASY | 235 |
| XVIII DINNER AT MISS ARCHIBALD'S | 246 |
| XIX POSING FOR HUGO | 260 |
| XX SUNDAY NIGHT SUPPER | 274 |
| XXI TELLING THE TRUTH TO GEORGE | 292 |
| XXII POSING FOR MARIGOLD | 309 |

PART I: MRS. TRENT'S HOUSE

PART I: *Mrs. Trent's House*

CHAPTER I

MARIGOLD

THE guiding impulses of Marigold Trent's nature were politeness and a feeling for the dramatic.

She could not bear to disappoint people; and if there was a choice between a graceful pretence and an awkward truth, it was the truth that suffered. She was not consciously dishonest. She seldom told a lie in so many words, and when she did she was truly unhappy and remorseful afterwards. That is, if the lie had been unkind. If it was kind, encouraging, or flattering, it did not count as a lie.

She would take a few tepid words of approbation and serve them up, smoking hot and richly garnished, to a delighted recipient. Hardly ever was she found out. One is not apt to go to an acquaintance and say: "I hear you said I was perfectly fascinating, and that you could listen to me all day because my voice sounds like a brook"; nor to be met with the reply: "No, I said you seemed nice enough, and had a pleasant voice."

Marigold thought about herself a great deal, a not unusual state of affairs. She was almost always dramatizing herself, part of her, actress; part of her, audience. Even the most prosaic actions took on a shining interest when she thought of herself as someone in a book doing those things. "Marigold tied a white apron over her dress of bright violet print," she would say to herself, "and carried into the pantry the plates with their amber streaks of marmalade, and half-empty tumblers beaded with tiny crystal bubbles." (Surely more charming than to say "the dirty breakfast dishes.") "The crumbs she saved for the robins who would come to the snowy window-sills this bitter day; for Marigold loved all little helpless things, and they loved her." And so on, through every step of her work as she cleared the breakfast table. Or, "Marigold walked on through the rain, her rosy face wet and shining. The rain pitted the puddles and drummed on her big umbrella." She could always see herself; and even when she was in real trouble or pain, there was a little part of her left to look on.

She loved to be approved of, although like many people who are most wistful of approbation she really believed that the opinions of others did not matter to her. She was always planning to adopt a course, rather vague in her own mind, of doing exactly as she pleased, regardless of a shocked world. What those startling and untrammelled ac-

tions would be she had not decided. She could only think of cigarettes and jade earrings, both rather tame, and running away with a married man, for which she had not the material. Meanwhile, she pursued an outwardly unexciting life, and was thought well of by old ladies for her pretty manners.

One day when Marigold was five years old, she was peeping into the mauve bell of a foxglove spire taller than herself. Her mother, seeing her absorbed little face, said softly to a friend: "She sees the fairies, you know."

Marigold knew perfectly well that what she was watching was a spider, but she could not disappoint her mother, and when the friend asked what she was looking at, she replied: "A darling little fairy with a little green cap."

The ladies were charmed—so, indeed, was Marigold, who in time almost believed that she had seen a fairy, and achieved great distinction among other more every-day little girls.

When Marigold was fourteen, all her emotions had turned towards religion, and she used to creep into Ellen the maid's room and gaze with a sort of terrified pleasure at two violently colored prints, our Lord in scarlet and blue displaying his Sacred Heart, flaming and pierced, oozing great drops of blood; and the Virgin, with uprolled eyes, clutching aside a blue mantle to show a heart from which a neat little yellow flame emerged, and around which

white roses were wreathed. She had made herself a prie-dieu from an empty box, a towel, two candles, and a vase of flowers which she sometimes arranged freshly, but more often allowed to remain until they dried up or Ellen grumblingly threw them away.

She meant to be a nun, and tried the effect of a coif with her towel when she dried her hair after a shampoo; fasted on Fridays whenever she remembered; and bought a cheap Rosary, which she was not at all sure how to use, and which she kept hidden in a bureau drawer under a pile of stockings until she forgot that it was there. She set herself penances for her sins—holding her arm out straight before her until it turned to prickling lead, keeping her head lifted from her pillow, once even tying a small piece of sand-paper under her shirt against her tender skin. It had all been very young and self-conscious and complacent—she had felt superior and serene, and when she was confirmed in a small white veil she had been supremely conscious of her effectiveness. But under it all had burned a real little flame of love and faith that remained with her all her life.

Her father had been Laurence Trent, the painter, whose studies of flowers—innocent water-colours that looked like the work of an inspired child—had had a certain vogue among collectors. Her mother, that romantic woman, Evelyn Trent, had died when

Marigold was six, and the little girl and her father had been close companions, traveling together wherever Laurence Trent's fancy led him, and living as cheaply as possible for he was not a good business man, and was apt to let his pictures go for next to nothing if he liked the purchaser, or to refuse good offers because a collector's eyes were too close together, or his nose was the wrong shape.

"You don't really need much," he would tell Marigold when funds were low. "Bread and beauty is better than bread and butter any day, and costs a great deal less."

They were perfectly happy together until the time came when her father must travel where Marigold could not go as yet, and she was left an orphan, and went to live with her father's mother.

Mrs. Trent was a charmingly pretty, rosy old woman, with pink ribbons on her cap. Those who did not know her well said that she was like an exquisite bit of Dresden china—a singularly inexact description of one who was, to tell the truth, as hard as nails. She and Marigold, however, got on excellently as a rule. Mrs. Trent only asked to be let alone. She also wanted the softest chair, the breast of the chicken, the top of the cream in the morning, and to go to bed as early as she liked, with a hot-water bag, a cigarette, and a novel—preferably shocking. (Although it was difficult to find any shocking enough to shock her.) She wanted these

things, and she got them. But she was a woman of breeding and intelligence, and living with her, while unemotional, was far from unpleasant.

She liked comfort better than anything else, and ran her household with a simple sophistication that used up all of her really quite respectable annuity as she went along. Her granddaughter had nothing, for Laurence Trent's income from his paintings naturally had died with him. Mrs. Trent welcomed Marigold, but for no one on earth would she have been unselfish enough to live more economically and save her money. She refused to look forward to a time when she would be dead and Marigold alone and penniless. Mrs. Trent ignored anything unpleasant unless it was actually with her—an aching tooth, or an impertinent parlour-maid. Then she dealt with the situation briskly and competently, because that was the quickest way to renewed comfort. But she would not think of things like poverty or death.

Marigold vaguely planned to earn her own living—it seemed to her the appropriate gesture for the situation. When she was offered, at an absurdly tiny salary, a position as teacher of the very young in a little private school run by a friend of the family, she insisted on taking it. Her grandmother did not object. She thought that it would keep Marigold occupied. In her day young ladies had busied themselves with wool-work, or Wardian cases

of ferns; now they must teach or write or go in for social service; but it was all the same thing—marking time until life's real business of matrimony should begin.

CHAPTER II

POSING FOR DONALD

THE school-room was flooded with sunlight in which the motes were dancing. It lay in yellow bars across the small empty desks, and touched the blackboard, on which was written in a neat round hand:

“Little pussy-willow,
Pretty little thing,
Coming with the sunshine
Of the early spring.”

On either side of the blackboard were pinned smudgy water-colour studies of pussy-willow sprays. On shelves and in the windows were more willow branches, milkweed pods containing “seed-babies”, dishevelled birds’ nests, and beans on wet blotting paper, putting forth pallid shoots.

Marigold and her pupils were engaged in the weekly occupation known as “doing the fish”. The aquarium had been cleaned, the pebbles and castle and water plants put back, and, amid a good deal of splashing, three unfortunate gold-fish and two tadpoles were being transferred from bucket to bowl

by the children whose "deportment" had been most nearly perfect through the week.

"Oo! I've got Miss Hopper!" shrilled a plain little girl in spectacles. (The fish had been named by the children for the teachers in the school. About the two tadpoles, recent acquisitions, there had been strong feeling. As they had come in February, the little boys were all for naming them after the month's heroes, George and Abraham: the little girls poetically thought of spring flowers, and chose Pansy and Violet. As a compromise the tadpoles were called Pansy and Abraham.)

"Don't say 'got', Gladys, say '*I have* Miss Hopper,'" corrected Marigold absently. She was happy. The school-room made neat for Saturday and gilded with sunlight, the children, interested and good, made a picture in her mind of which she was the central figure. She saw herself as the young and beautiful teacher surrounded by her adoring little flock. Stealing a glance at her reflection in the glass of the bookcase door, she saw sun-bright hair, bobbed like a little boy's, and turning up at the ends; slender body in a myrtle green dress—a daffodil in its gray-green sheath. (So her thoughts ran pleasantly.) Her hands looked very white against her green frock, as she put them in graceful positions. In her voice and in the voices of the children sang a note of secret happiness, and a bright clear light lay on them all.

Miss Hopper herself appeared at the doorway. Pince-nez attached to a black watered ribbon bestrode her small red nose; her manly shirt was covered with bits of paper, on which were written in large letters, "Ginevra spoke without permission", "Dwight was tardy", "Mary Katherine pinched de Courcey". This method of punishment through publicity was Miss Hopper's own invention, and did no one any harm.

"Now, Miss Trent," she said briskly, "time the little friends were trotting." (Miss Hopper often said, "There are no teachers or pupils in *my* school —only big friends and little friends.") "Say good-bye to our friends the fishes, and we'll make our good-bye circle. One of the little friends needs to use the handkerchief—ah! That is right, Lois! Now take hands."

"Now our work is over for another da-hay,
Put away so neatly is our work and pla-hay,
So goodbye, dear children, may the Lord above"

(Unreachably above: none of the piping voices quite got there!)

"Keep us while we're absent with his ten-der love."

"Good-bye, Walter."

"'Bye Miss Hopper; 'bye Miss Trent."

"Good-bye, Constance."

"'Bye Miss Hop; 'bye Miss Trent."

From the cloak-room came sounds of battle. Miss Hopper called sharply:

“*Children!* Let’s see if you can’t play-pretend you’re little mice, still as still!”

A sudden silence fell, broken only by a slight squeaking, essayed with comic intent by one of the mice. Miss Hopper turned to Marigold.

“Can you come to supper to-night, childie? Edgar has a friend visiting him and I’m going to ask Ada Dunham and her young man—an informal frolic-frisk, with just a bite and perhaps a jolly little sing afterwards.”

Miss Hopper prided herself on being, as she put it, “Human, if I *am* an old school-marm.” She often used the slang of years ago, and loved to make remarks that ended with the tag, “as the boys say.” She ran her ridiculous little school in a bright firm manner: her two assistants, Ada Dunham and Marigold, were paid almost nothing, but were given to understand that all would be made up to them by sumptuous gifts when they married and had babies. Meanwhile, Miss Hopper out of school hours was firmly “just one of the girls” with them.

Miss Hopper’s small room, where the “frolic-frisk” was held that evening, shone with Culture and the Larger Life. It was lit by candle-light, which was becoming, even if it did make it difficult to see just what was going into the creamed oysters bubbling in the chafing-dish. On the oatmeal-

papered walls hung photographs of European cathedrals, and, above a bookcase replete with the works of Sir Rabindranath Tagore, a sepia copy of Mona Lisa. ("We just seem to understand each other," Miss Hopper was fond of saying, pointing to Leonardo's lady. "When I'm feeling all in, her smile seems so sad, as if it held all the sorrow of the world, it's almost as if I could hear her saying, 'I understand, Harriette Hopper—I've suffered, too, my friend, *moi aussi*.' But when I'm there with bells on, then Mona looks so happy—and, well, she understands that, too! We're pretty good pals, Mona Lisa and I! But you'll be thinking I have bats in my belfry, as the boys say!")

Here and there, in "arts and crafts" green pottery bowls full of pebbles, Chinese lilies lifted reluctant spikes. ("I may live in one room, or, as I sometimes call it, one pill-box, but I must have my wee bit garden—'a lovesome thing, God wot!'" said Miss Hopper; and also quoted the bit about white hyacinths for your soul rather than extra bread for your stomach, which sounds such good advice to one who has never been hungry.)

Above her desk hung Mr. Kipling's "IF"—"It *helps*," she would say simply—and a kindly quatrain on the subject of assisting lame dogs over stiles.

Miss Hopper herself, in a red tea-gown liberally garnished with Roman coins, was stirring the oys-

ters, her face scarlet with heat and excitement. Her nephew, Edgar Hopper, a not unusual youth, ate cream cheese sandwiches. Ada Dunham and her fiancé, a bleak young couple with a mutual mild passion for "antiques" and "first editions", were having a sedate rapture over a small, dull, but unquestionably old volume they had found on the table.

Marigold, flushed, sparkling, lovely, mixed salad dressing, and felt the eyes of Edgar's friend upon her. She had never seen a man as startlingly handsome. He was very dark (like a Spanish nobleman, she decided), with a grave direct unsmiling gaze. This gaze, for which, to tell the truth, young Mr. Boynton was justly famous, was turned steadily on Marigold. There was, perhaps, not much reason for turning it on either of the other ladies—Miss Hopper, as red as her tea-gown, tasting her cookery with ostentatious smacks of relish, or prim Miss Dunham in her "beaded georgette", exclaiming, "Kenneth, isn't this Windsor chair very, very fascinating! By the way, I saw a delightful one at Shorter's to-day I think we might pick up." (Miss Dunham and her Kenneth never acquired anything except by the process known as "picking up.")

But Marigold in love-in-a-mist blue was worth looking at.

She turned the dressing over the lettuce as Miss Hopper began to shout playfully, "Ting-a-ling!"

Ting-a-ling! Supper's weady, boys and dirls!" As she fumbled with the strings of the big apron that she felt had added a piquant touch to her floating chiffon draperies, Donald Boynton put her hands aside and untied the knot.

"What helpless little hands," he said protectively. "Now you're going to sit right here on the couch, and I'm going to bring you your supper. Here, let me put these pillows behind your back. That right?"

He brought oysters and salad, and they sat side by side on the almost-Bagdad draperies that cloaked Miss Hopper's virgin couch during its more public hours.

"All comfortable?" Mr. Boynton inquired. "Lean back and rest—poor little thing, you're tired to death."

Marigold, who was feeling perfectly fresh and lively, immediately became conscious of herself as a fragile flower, drooping with delicate fatigue. She sighed, nestled into her cushions, gave him an appealing smile.

"How horrid of me to show that I was tired."

"I'm very quick at feeling an atmosphere," said Mr. Boynton. "I always have been—sort of a sixth sense, I guess. I *get* people, if you know what I mean. People who know have told me I'm very psychic."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Marigold eagerly. "Isn't that funny—they always tell *me*—"

"It's no credit to me," broke in Mr. Boynton modestly but firmly. "A Hindu chap I happened to run into once told me that if I'd only develop my latent psychic powers I could do practically anything with them. But that's meddling with dangerous stuff, I always think. Now I can feel you—some people are so much more vivid than others—now you're like a little flame. And you're not very happy."

Marigold, who was, felt the first stirrings of a secret sorrow—a sorrow as yet so secret that she herself had not decided what it would be; and when he said, "You're not, are you?" she replied, "Yes, I'm—happy," in the brave, heart-breaking voice of one who lies gallantly.

Beautiful Mr. Boynton was completely satisfactory. With his dark face dramatically set, he said under his breath, but loud enough for Marigold to overhear him:

"My God! Some lucky devil will teach her what happiness is some day!"

CHAPTER III

TEA IN THE DRAWING ROOM

IT was delightful to be able to say on the day following Miss Hopper's party:

“Granny, Edgar Hopper and a friend who's visiting him may possibly be coming to tea this afternoon, if you don't mind.”

“So *that's* why you chose to pick the peach blossoms!” said old Mrs. Trent, with some asperity. She liked fruit better than flowers, and there was only one peach-tree in the garden: besides, the petals made a litter on the hearth-rug. Now she shuffled her playing cards with a snap, and spread them for a new Patience.

“Granny?”

“Black on red, but I can't get at the four.”

“May I tell Mary we'll have the fruit cake?”

“Certainly *not!* And kindly tell me how I can pay attention to the cards while you roar in my ear!”

Marigold was able to dramatize herself into almost any rôle she took a fancy to, but the part of adored and adoring granddaughter was one that she knew better than to attempt.

When her grandmother went upstairs for her afternoon nap, Marigold put her finishing touches to the drawing-room. The fragile loveliness of the peach-blossoms sprayed against the pale green wall under the portrait of her beautiful mother, and pots of hyacinths scented the air. She looked approvingly at the magazines spread out on the gate-leg table—*Country Life*, *The Sketch*, *The Fortnightly Review*, and *Punch*. Others, pleasant for moments of mental relaxation, but not quite in the picture, she put out of sight among the galoshes in the coat-closet under the stairs. Then, frowning delicately, she looked along the book-shelves, half drew out a volume of Dostoevsky, put it back, selected Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market", and left it, open and face down, with her handkerchief crumpled beside it, on the window-seat. It was clear to be seen that this afternoon Marigold was going to be exquisitely bred, carefully sheltered, and a little wistful.

Her costume called for earnest thought. The crêpe-de-chine, which Granny advised, would look too "dressed up", as if she had wanted to make an impression. She put on a short corduroy skirt and a jumper, and she would carry her knitted cap, to give a look of having just run in from the garden.

She was ready. The clock downstairs whirred and struck five. With thumping heart she listened for the bell.

Tea was not particularly successful. Donald Boynton assiduously devoted himself to Mrs. Trent, under the "lovely, fragile bit of Dresden china" hallucination, and was so respectful, and so pointedly kind to the aged that he exasperated her to the snapping point. Marigold, after her thrilled anticipation, felt rather flat as she sat behind the big tea-pot and poured the best China tea into the best pink cups. Edgar Hopper ate lettuce sandwich after lettuce sandwich with the continuity of that mechanical toy, *The Rabbit that Eats the Carrot*. They touched on Paris—the gentlemen had not been there; old furniture; gardening; horses (Mr. Boynton spoke of the joy of feeling a good bit of horse-flesh beneath him); whether men should wear tan socks; French literature, which Mr. Boynton professed to delight in.

Granny, hopeful of new shockers, shot out a few questions in excellent French. Mr. Boynton, who would gladly have throttled her, flushed darkly, and said he feared he had grown rather rusty.

Coco, the cross and elderly little black dog, sat dribbling, his eyes on jammy bits disappearing into people's mouths; Heathcliff and Trillium, the canaries, shouted in their cages.

Edgar Hopper said he must go.

"But don't think *you* have to come, old top, that is, unless you want to," he said to his friend with singular infelicity.

"May I stay a little longer?" Donald asked Marigold. "Perhaps you would show me the garden."

"Yes, the garden is at its best in early March," said Mrs. Trent.

Donald Boynton gave her a murderous glare. Marigold hurried him out of doors, Coco mincing behind them.

The air was cold and damp, soothing after the hot room heavy with antagonism. The trees and the borders were bare, but on the grass under a beech-tree a sheet of snow-drops glimmered through the dusk. Donald was silent; Marigold spoke nervously:

"I'm so glad you and Edgar were able to drop in. He's so nice, isn't he?"

"Yes, Ted's a prince of good fellows," said his friend perfunctorily, and lapsed into silence again.

"I was so glad to have Granny meet you," went on Marigold, the demon of nervousness urging her on from banality to banality.

"Your grandmother seems to be a remarkably well preserved old lady," said Donald regretfully.

"Miss Hopper——"

"Oh, my God!" he interrupted. "I didn't stay to talk about Ted and your grandmother and Miss Hopper! I go through that devilish hour in there—it was, you know it as well as I do—burning up for a word with you—and then you bring me out here to talk about Miss Hopper! I'm going to do

the talking now, and I'm going to talk about us—you and me! Do you know I'm going away to-morrow? That I'll probably never see you again? Not that it matters to you, but it does to me—damnably."

Her heart stood still. She could not have spoken. Indoors, at the tea-table, she had felt disappointed in him, irritated by his boasting, his pretense, his air of self-satisfaction, slight, but perceptible. But now his beautiful face, straining towards her through the dusk, was stripped of everything but longing; his hungry eyes devoured her.

"Marigold—would you care if we never saw each other again? You've got to answer me. Would you?"

"I—I—"

"Would you?"

"I hope we'll—we'll see each other again."

"We will—we will! There's something I must tell you—not yet. Don't forget me, little golden flame." He seized both her trembling hands, hurting them, and kissed the under sides of her wrists with hot lips; then swung away through the gathering darkness.

Marigold, her heart leaping in her breast, saw the folded snow-drops through a dazzle of tears. She shut her eyes to see his face again. She lifted her wrists to her lips and kissed where he had kissed.

Donald unfortunately had left his gloves at Mrs.

Trent's, and did not realize it until he was half way back to Edgar Hopper's. They were new gloves, English, and expensive, and he considered going back for them. But his parting with Marigold had been too perfect to run the risk of any touch of anti-climax. Besides, she might find them and send them to him.

However, it was Mrs. Trent who found his gloves, and, having made up her mind as to whom they belonged, she made a present of them to the black boy who took care of the furnace, carrying them to him majestically between gingerly thumb and finger, with a slightly averted face.

CHAPTER IV

UNDER THE MOON

DONALD came again to visit the Hoppers, and before he came he wrote to Marigold:

“Dear Miss Trent:

“Prepare yourself for a shock—I’m coming out your way next week, and something tells me that I’ll be so near your house most of the time that you’ll trip over me going in and coming out. Hope the shock of this bad news doesn’t prove too much for you!

“Please notice how good I am, beginning this letter ‘Dear Miss Trent.’ You see I want to make one large-sized hit, which is the reason for the Society touches. But it isn’t as Miss Trent I think of you.

“Yours faithfully,

“Donald Boynton.”

He thought that he might be disillusioned when he saw Marigold again; but with each meeting he found her sweeter, more disturbing. He was astonished at the depth of his feeling for her. He was beautiful and emotional; of course he had had his adventures. But the girls he had known best were

different; perfumed little girls who were consciously alluring, sophisticated; who knew how to kiss. Girls who could look out for themselves; who never awoke in him the protective instinct as this child had done, this child with her innocent eyes and her skin as smooth and cool as the petal of a flower.

Marigold made him feel strong, cynical, wise in dark knowledge from which she must be shielded. At first he loved her because she made him love himself. He, like Marigold, was given to posing; but Marigold was content to be her own audience, while Donald must have someone outside of himself to admire and applaud. Marigold was the most perfect audience he had ever had. While her lips said, "Granny's quite well, thank you," or, "The children *were* so naughty this morning!" her eyes, her hands, the droop of her sun-bright head, said:

"How strong and wise you are! How weak and inexperienced you make me feel—and yet how safe! How wonderful that any one who knows life as you do should care to talk to me. Be patient with my weakness and simplicity, you who have so much strength and knowledge to spare."

What her mind was saying was: "I wonder—I wonder. Am I falling in love? Is this it? Going hot and cold when I hear his name or see his writing—is that being in love? Sometimes I feel as if I would rather die than ever see him again. Surely I would *know* if it was love."

Love, love, love. It spun in her brain like a humming top. The books said a woman never really loved until after she was married. It would be wonderful to be married, anyway, and begin to live: an unhappy marriage would be better than none at all.

Love seemed to her an impersonal shimmer of rose and gold. She had always seen herself reverently adored, tenderly cherished, by a dim shape whose features changed from day to day as she met new men or read new books. She herself took no great part in these mild dreams, beyond remaining pure, exquisite, and inspirational. Love seemed to her more or less like a nice bath—pleasantly warm, but not hot enough to hurt: punctuated at proper intervals by a ring, a cloudy wedding gown, and three or four fat pink babies with big blue eyes—or two with blue and two with brown, if their potential father was dark at the moment.

She was ready for love, and Donald was there.

She tried to analyze her feelings toward him. Why did she love him—if she did love him? He was so strong and good looking and sure of himself, and he thought that she was so wonderful. That was enough, surely. But why was she not quite certain? Was it snobbishness? Mrs. Trent had asked her, apropos of Donald: “Why need you go out of your own class for friends?” Marigold had to admit to herself that she would not have been so

indignant if there had been no justice in her grandmother's question. It was disgusting, it was vulgar, it was snobbish, to talk about class. But all the same, said an inconvenient voice in her mind, his language and your language are different—how will you talk together? His rules and your rules aren't quite the same—how will you play together? You can shout Snob to yourself all day and all night, but you know that it is so.

But if you loved a person, that would be all the more reason for love, she told herself hotly. The realization that people might think Donald's birth and breeding not all that might be desired made her heart turn to his with a passionate glow of loyalty and protection.

She sat in her bed-room, writing to Donald.

The room was small, the narrow bed nun-like, with Guido Reni's "Ecce Homo" hanging above it slightly askew, with a bit of holy palm, presented by Mary, fastened at the top. The walls had faded nearly white, except where here and there pictures had been moved, leaving oblongs brightly patterned in bunches of yellow primroses and green leaves. In one corner a wigless doll lay in her cradle. In the bookcase were "The Robber Kitten" and "Puff the Pomeranian", and the deathless works of Miss Alcott and Miss Susan Coolidge, with whose ingenuous tales Marigold refreshed her-

self during times of mental strain. The room was still a child's room.

Wrapped in a red bath-robe, Marigold wrote, in pencil, in an old copy book:

“Little House, Tuesday.

“Dear Don:

“Thank you for the book.” (“The book” had been a bitter blow, being a collection of rather exhausting poems in French-Canadian patois, on the order of:

“Venez ici, mon cher ami, an’ sit down by me—so,
An’ I will tole you story of ol’ tam long ago—.”

Marigold, reading them, had wondered, with an unwilling flash of amusement, whether they represented the French literature to which Donald was so devoted.) “I am looking forward so much to reading it, and you were kind to think of me.

“Nothing happens here, you know. At least, nothing that would interest *you*, although when I come to think of it, there are several happenings most thrilling to *me*. The lawn is all starry with crocuses, for one thing, with bees crawling in and out of them; I am writing this under the beech-tree, with the sun all warm and golden, and Coco stalking the fat robins he never can catch. You never saw such fat robins, with bright scarlet waistcoats, all dressed for their weddings.

“Then there’s been a tragedy. Miss Trent, the gold-fish (I told you about the gold-fish at school, didn’t I? And the babies named this one after me,

the lambs) is no more. We buried her in a chocolate box, with dandelions atop,"

(Here she turned a page, and the copy book interposed: "Lives of great men all remind us We can make our lives sublime." Marigold continued:) "and little Felix Hunt wrote this poem for the occasion:

'Here lies Miss Trent
We are sorry she went
She is now with the angels on high
But our own darling Miss Trent who has legs instead
of a tail is still alive and oh how happy am I'

"Imagine my feelings of pride!
"I must run to Granny—she is calling for me to come and read to her.

"Sincerely your friend,
"Marigold Trent."

She read over her letter; it seemed to show her in a satisfactory light. She copied it in ink, absently wrote: "Marigold Boynton—Mrs. Donald Boynton", on a bit of paper; tore that into tiny pieces, put out the light, and went to bed.

Donald wrote to Marigold:

"Marigold dear:

"You don't know what your letters have meant to me—perhaps I can tell you some day.

"I am pegging away—doing pretty well at that. But you can't have an idea of the strain a man's under, the tough thing a man's life is. Thank God you can't, pray God you never will! You

were made to be sheltered, like some lovely flower, and it hurts to think of you slaving for those kids, and being so sweet and thoughtful with your grandmother, with never a thought for yourself. I get all kind of choked up when I think about it.

“I enclose a snap-shot of myself, just to make you laugh. The black thing is the little mother, but she moved, so you can’t see what she looks like. She’s a mighty fine little proposition, and I want you two to get together. In lots of ways you remind me of each other. That thing we are standing under is an arbor covered with crimson rambler roses, which would certainly appeal to you, with your love of flowers and things artistic.

“I have been going to a lot of parties lately, but somehow the girls all seem sort of lemons. Guess I’ll give up this society stunt. There’s nothing in it for me any more.

“If things break right, I’m coming to your town next month. Can I see you then, Marigold? I love to write your name—Marigold. There’s something I want to tell you.

“Yours,

“Don.”

“Marigold! Marigold!”

He came, and they went for a walk, to get away from Mrs. Trent; but something was wrong; they were far away from each other. Their voices, sounding strange to their own ears, called in vain across the gulf, saying words. She hated him as she saw his mouth take on a self-consciously cynical curve; and he felt her grow hard against

him, and hated her. But still they called to each other, remembering the wonder they had felt when their thoughts had run together; and trying to conquer the weight and deadness of the spiritual atmosphere.

"It's wonderful to see you, Marigold," he said unconvincingly.

"And it's so nice to see *you*," she answered in a bright artificial voice. The subject was finished.

"Tell me all about yourself," she began again, still speaking brightly and artificially, sounding like a hostess who does her duty by a dull guest. "What have you been doing since you were here before?"

"Tell me all about yourself'! Heavens, Marigold, what a conversational opening! It's as stupefying as having some one say to you, 'I've always heard how amusing you are—*do* say something amusing!' It isn't worthy of you."

"I'm sorry you don't like my way of talking, Don," she said, in a gentle, martyred tone that made him long to shake her. Instead, he said:

"I may be going to Russia soon."

"Really?" she replied politely, perfectly aware of the fact that the idea had only that moment entered his head. The trick of announcing an imminent absence was too old and obvious to impress her; she had too often used it herself.

"You sound as if you would be overcome with grief!"

"Of course I would be sorry to have *any* of my friends go so far away; but it would be a wonderful experience for you, wouldn't it?"

He gave a mirthless (and melodramatic) laugh.

"It's fortunate that I have a sense of humour!" he said bitterly. They walked on in hostile silence broken by banal remarks. At her gate again, Mari-gold said: "Won't you come in and have some tea? Granny would be delighted."

"No, thanks, I promised Ted to be back early. We're dining out before some dance at the Club, I believe. Will I see you there?"

"Yes, I think so." She longed to have him gone, she was so afraid that she would begin to cry. What had happened between them? They neither of them knew, only they were hard, and withdrawn from one another.

She dragged herself upstairs, trying with deep sobbing breaths to lift the unhappiness that lay like a crushing, choking weight on her chest and lungs. Her eyes smarted with tears; and her whole body was tense and aching. But her hardness against him had melted, and she longed to have the old understanding, to have him caring for her again. She would see him to-night; perhaps then everything would be all right again, and they would laugh to think how silly they had been that afternoon.

After dinner, with Granny safe in bed, she dressed for the dance, dawdling over her dressing, for she

wanted him to be there when she arrived. She lay in a deep, hot bath, growing relaxed and soothed; cold-creamed herself liberally; dusted on powder—her part to-night was a pale and touching one, and she noted with satisfaction the faint blue shadows beneath her eyes; brushed her bright hair until every tendril glistened. Her gown was white and gleaming, and behind her little ears she had dabbled expensive scent, saved for tremendous occasions. She felt like a satin-white orange-blossom bud, precious and suave.

When she saw Donald, the strange separation would have melted away. She even planned a little scene between them. She would say, in a shy, charming voice: "Don—I forgive you!" and when he asked: "For what?" she would reply with wistful gaiety: "For my having been so horrid to you this afternoon!" Then he would say—

She would leave it to him, what he would say!

Although she was late in reaching the Club, Donald's party was not yet there. But in the dressing-room she came into the midst of a conversation about him.

"If I hadn't a beau already, I certainly would go after him," announced Conny Grange, who was engaged to be married. "I think he's the most marvellous looking thing that ever struck *this town*."

"Well, he agrees with you," said another girl.

"Yes, I guess he does. But Pinky visits where he comes from and she says the girls there are crazy about him. Hello, Marigold; oh, my dear, what a *darling* dress, I'm crazy about it!"

"Hello, Conny—hello, Anita—Eleanor—everybody."

"We're talking about the beautiful Boynton—he's giving you a rush, isn't he?"

"*Mercy*, no!"

"Oh, isn't he? I heard he was rushing some one, but perhaps it was Ethel. I guess it was, he was there for lunch, and they're all there for dinner to-night."

"Did Pinky say what his family was like? He isn't *quite*, is he?" Anita Steele asked.

"She said he had an awful ma who wasn't even quite *quite*, and thought all the girls were after him, but that he gets asked everywhere."

"Oh, well, my dear, you know. A *man*!"

"Mrs. Hopper told Mother he plays a wonderful game of bridge, and of course that makes him solid with the older women. And then he's awfully conceited, but he certainly can dance—o-oh!"

"Bet you anything Ethel doesn't let any one else have a look-in."

"My dear, Pinky says a girl where he lives says he has a wider variety of kisses than any other living man! Don't you *love* it?"

Marigold felt sick. The dance was dull and

tiring, and Donald had not yet come. If he had really wanted to see her, he would have been there long before this, Ethel or no Ethel. She stayed a little longer, hoping that he would come and ask her for a dance, so that she could say:

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Don, I haven’t *one* left—but if you want to cut in sometime——”

But he did not come, and presently she went home with a neighbour.

She tore off her gleaming gown, and lay on the bed in a huddled heap, crying as if her heart would break. It was long after midnight when she heard a soft whistle under her window—heard it again and again. Looking out she saw Donald standing there in the moonlight, and her heart gave such a leap that she nearly fainted.

“Marigold!” he called softly: “Come down—just a minute—please—please! I must speak to you!”

“Don! Go away! I can’t possibly come down!”

“I *must* speak to you. I won’t go away until you come. I’ll break in to you if you won’t come down to me.”

She put on some clothes, shaking so that she could hardly fasten them, crept down the stairs, and let herself out into the moonlit garden.

“Don—we’re *crazy*!”

“Come where we won’t be heard!”

There was a little orchard behind the garden,

drenched with moonlight and the scent of apple-blossoms. He wrapped his coat around her.

“Little Marigold—you’re trembling! You’re not afraid of me, are you, sweet? I couldn’t sleep, could you? Could you, Marigold? After this damnable afternoon—and then when I got to the dance, you were gone. Marigold, tell me it’s all right! Why, my darling, you’re crying.”

“I thought you hated me,” she sobbed.

“Oh, you little donkey!” His arms were around her, his lips on her hair, her neck, her wet face. “Look at me, my lamb! Oh, Marigold! I love you, I love you, I love you!”

They kissed again and again, clinging to each other under the moon-silvered trees. He said in a broken voice:

“I thought that I had lost you.”

“What happened to us this afternoon, Don?”

“God knows—I don’t! But it was hellish.”

Spent with the day of emotion, she lay exhausted in his arms, until presently he said:

“Now you must go in, my little white angel of God. But before you go in, tell me again that everything is all right. Tell me that you love me.”

“I love you, Don.”

“And you always will. Say you always will—darling—darling——”

“Always—always——”

CHAPTER V

MUDDLE

THE night she told Donald that she would marry him, Marigold lay on her bed as if she lay on a golden cloud. The darkness seemed to shine, to blossom with stars. She lay trembling and thrilling, remembering the long slow smouldering look, almost as if he hated her, that he had given her as he drew her to him before his first kiss—remembering the kiss, delicate, gentle, slow, at first, then clinging, burning, as if he drank her whole being into himself through it. She lay until morning, her eyes wide, trembling, drowning in the memory of his passion.

But when Don went home, other people became visible, as the stars appear again when the sun is no longer in the sky. Granny appeared, decidedly. She detested Donald and disapproved thoroughly of the engagement. She and he showed an armed neutrality to each other when they were together; but, when they were apart, each poured views of the other into the ears of the harassed Marigold.

Donald was desperately in love, and pleaded for an early marriage.

“Won’t you just come away somewhere, just the two of us, and be married, Marigold? What do you care for a satin dress and chicken salad, and a lot of old fools gaping at you, and getting a maudlin thrill out of the way you’re feeling and the way I’m feeling, when it’s none of their damned business *what* we’re feeling? Just you and I, and then we’d go to a place I know where there’s a cabin by a lake, under the pine trees, with not a soul but us two for a hundred miles. There’s a waterfall where a stream comes into the lake—you could bathe there, my little white beautiful! And there’d be fish in the brooks, and wild berries to gather together. And then it would get dark, and there’d be little night noises, and the lake slapping on the shore, and the stars would come, millions of them. I’d have made you a bed of balsam boughs, baby. We’d sit on the doorstep looking at the stars awhile—and then I’d take you into the cabin—oh, Marigold! Darling, darling! Say you will. Who knows what may happen if we wait? Come with me, darling!”

But Marigold shook her head. “It would kill Granny.”

“Not it!” said her lover in tones of the utmost conviction. He had completely recovered from the Great Dresden China Illusion.

“Don, I can’t. I’m all that Granny has in the world, and she’s so old. You and I love each other. We ought to be satisfied with that,” said Marigold,

who was at the moment undergoing a severe attack of nobility.

“Oh, *damn* Granny! I’m sorry, Sweetheart, I shouldn’t have said that. But she’s had her life.”

The age-old cry of youth.

Marigold let him rage against old Mrs. Trent, who, it must be admitted, did what she could to make life unbearable for him; even agreed with some of his opinions, for it was so much pleasanter to be called “an understanding little pal,” and to have the effect of complete sympathy. But when she was alone she felt wretchedly that she had betrayed Granny for a stranger. Curiously, she did not think so much of Mrs. Trent as she knew her now, but as she had been when she was Marigold’s age. She seemed actually to see her, making ready for bed in an old house where the ivy tapped against the windows. She saw her long full night-gown with white ribbons tying it at her smooth throat, her hands spraying delicately from the frilled sleeves, as she wrote to her lover, her brow under her bands of satin-smooth hair young and smooth and defenceless. Thinking of her, Marigold seemed to see the past through a mist of yearning tenderness—crinolines swelling and swaying; little silky heads; slender hands holding small flat bouquets of white and scarlet japonicas; splendid young men in blue coats and grey beaver hats—all so young and innocent and defenceless, not really

knowing that some day they would be old, and love would be over. She felt that in betraying Granny she was betraying all that gentle past. She tried to put her feelings into a letter to Don. He answered:

“Can’t say I exactly get you on the subject of ye olden days, dear. I like old things as much as anybody, in fact some of the best scouts I know are the fathers of fellows I was in college with, but when it comes to you and me waiting patiently to be married until your grandmother sees fit to say when (which won’t be soon, believe me), just because some old-time people once wore hoop skirts and high hats and sang The Blue Alsatian Mountains—I’m damned if I can see any sense! You know I’d love every word you wrote, sweet, if it was the multiplication table backward, but your lover isn’t a poet—he’s just a man who wants his girl.”

Ada Dunham was inclined to be confidential, now that Marigold was also an engaged girl. They had taken the little friends to the woods for a picnic, and to stalk their little friends, the birds, and their little friends, the plant babies, and for the moment they were alone together, laying out paper plates of hard-boiled eggs and jam sandwiches on the uneven table-cloth, while in the distance Miss Hopper’s

voice could be heard brightly holding forth to the little friends on the subjects of Mother Earth, Brother Brook, Sister South Wind, Little Hepatica, and the Fern Babies.

“Mr. Thompson,” confided Ada (so she would have spoken of her fiancé to his own mother, Marigold thought), “thinks Mr. Boynton is so very, very delightful. A gentleman in every sense of the word, he said, he did really, and Kenneth—Mr. Thompson—is *very* critical. Mr. Boynton may take it as a real compliment, for Mr. Thompson doesn’t often volunteer a good opinion, really he doesn’t. Not that he is uncharitable, Miss Trent, I don’t mean *that*, for he isn’t, he’s the most charitable man I ever knew, and gentle as a woman. But if he can’t conscientiously say anything *good* about any one, why, he just says nothing at all. I think it’s a lovely trait, I really do. He has a poem pinned over his desk, I tell him really it’s very, very characteristic, it goes:

“ ‘There’s so much good in the *worst* of us,
And so much bad in the *best* of us—’ ”

“When do you expect to be married?” asked Marigold. She wondered if Kenneth—Mr. Thompson—longed for his Miss Dunham; if her heart leapt with fascinated terror when she thought of belonging to him. When they kissed, what did they do about Mr. Thompson’s glasses? Did he remove

them, placing them out of harm's way on the mantle-piece, before he saluted his Ada? Did they kiss at all? Had any one ever kissed, except Don and Marigold—flaming into fire, melting into mist?

Many times Don's voice and hers joined in the great chorus that goes up at every hour of the day; from under the flowering chestnut trees of France; across the snows of Russia; beside mountain waterfalls; from desert sands; in porcelain pagodas and Esquimau igloos; and under jungle tree-ferns: "We are different, you and I. No one has ever loved as we love—no one has ever felt what we are feeling."

"*Mercy!*" cried Miss Dunham. "The salt for the eggs is *all* over the chocolate cake! What was that you said, Miss Trent? Oh, yes, why—not for two or three years, I hardly think. Mr. Thompson and myself want to pick up our furniture gradually, you know, all early American, we really have some very, very delightful old pieces, Miss Trent, we'd be only too pleased to show them to you sometime when Mr. Boynton was on. Mama and I would be more than pleased if you and he would drop in to afternoon tea very very informally some day. Mr. Thompson wouldn't be one bit happy with just any furniture, he's really very sensitive to his surroundings, so we thought we'd take our time. He really has wonderful taste, Miss Trent, it isn't just because we're engaged I'm saying that, but

really. I guess probably Mr. Boynton's that way too, isn't he? And then anyway, we couldn't be married for a *long* time, because I'm embroidering three dozen of everything with my monogram, A. V. D.—Ada Veta Dunham, you know—and I do think dainty linen's so important, don't you? Of course, I had some things in my Hope Chest before Mr. Thompson and myself became engaged, some dainty little guest towels——”

The little friends, looking slightly stupefied as the result of a plethora of bird calls, appeared, shepherded by Miss Hopper, giving her celebrated imitation of a dinner bell. She murmured in a confidential aside to Marigold:

“I know what the girlies were chattering away about! Their ain true loves! Oh, I may be an old school-marm, but I'm on, as the boys say!”

June came, with summer holidays, and strawberries for breakfast. In the afternoons Mrs. Trent and Marigold had tea in the garden, while copper-pink petals from the climbing sweet-brier rose drifted into their cups, and Coco tried to climb the fox-glove spires, or with tiny officious barks ordered vagrant butterflies off the premises. Marigold's letters to Don became corpulent with flora—pressed pinks, bits of lavender.

There were letters for Marigold. Mrs. Boynton, the little black thing who had moved, in the

photograph taken under the rose-arbour, wrote on mauve paper embellished with a huge gilt E, that had apparently begun to sprout and put forth little golden twigs and tendrils:

“—and I feel as if instead of losing a son I was gaining a daughter. Donald and I have always been so close, it’s always ‘Little Sweetheart’ here and ‘My Best Girl’ there, and another of his names for me is ‘Little Chum O’ Mine’, so you see maybe I’ll be a teeny-weeny bit jealous of his new ‘Best Girl’! But I just know I shall love you from what Son tells me, and also from the way you look in the pretty snaps with your dear little dog Cocoa which my boy showed me. Donald has always been such a popular boy, lots of girls would like to be in your place, but the best of it is that with all his looks and popularity, I send my boy to you *clean*—”

A girl miles away cried all night, bathed her red eyes, powdered her nose, and wrote:

“Nobody knows better than I do what a fine fellow Don Boynton is, and I wish you both all the joy in the world. Give my best to Don the next time you see him. It’s quite a coincidence, isn’t it, that after having been pals for *ages*, as Don and I have been, we should be announcing our engagements at just about the same time? I wish I might meet you, but I’m afraid I will be married

and moved away before you come here to live, from what Don tells me."

Miss Hopper, spending the holidays in an artistic colony on the coast, wrote:

"—so sorry you won't be with us at the School this winter, but of course I know that Prince Charming of yours wants to carry you off as soon as ever he can. My, my if he only knew all I do! But don't worry, I won't give you away!"

"Of course, this is just my fun, but, joking aside, Lady Mine, will you let the old school-marm give the little Bride one wee sma' word of advice? I just want to remind you of the two animals that should be in every little new Home—Bear, and Fore Bear! And then there's a sweet old saying, 'As your wedding ring wears, your cares will wear away', and I know the little girl will find it's true as well as sweet.

"This is a delightful place, wonderfully worthwhile people, all gifted with what I have dubbed The Three P's—Personality, Purpose, and 'Pep'. They are always doing such *real* things, making the quaintest arts-and-craftsy jewelry, or batiks, or staging plays in one of the fish-sheds here. I found a little hand-hammered bon-bon spoon at the quaintest little tea-room and gift-shop, 'Ye Signe of Ye Bay-berrie Candle', which I'm hoping you'll find a use

for in the new little home. You would revel in it here, with your keen sense of the artistic, such *atmosphere*——”

A seamstress wrote:

“Am sending the six night-gowns with the tucking and scalloping, must say they look real well, they are so sheer and pretty. Ran the pale pink ribbon in to get the effect. You and your grandma have always been so kind to me, am glad to have the chance to work on your trousseau. Will start work to-morrow on the chemises.”

Don wrote:

“I can’t stand it much longer, sweet, I’ve got to have you. I lie awake at night with my arms aching for you, dreaming of the time when they will hold you. I’m mad for you, Marigold. You ask me why I can’t be patient—you darling little fool, don’t you know why I can’t be? Don’t you?”

She carried that letter inside her blouse, and slept with it beneath her pillow. But she was not very happy, as time went on.

Granny was difficult, for one thing. When Don, prompted by Marigold, sent her a box of sweets for her birthday, she expressed hearty astonishment that he should have known enough for the civility. He could do nothing civilized or pleasant without call-

ing forth fervent exclamations of relief and surprise from old Mrs. Trent. When Marigold defended him, with wet eyes and flaming cheeks, her grandmother would sulk, or, like natives of India, "go into the silence."

But that was unimportant compared with Marigold's own feeling towards Don. While he was away from her, she was happy. She could shut her eyes and feel his lips on her eyelids, see his dark face, the flash of his white teeth when he laughed. A thousand times a day she turned to him. In shops, at lunch with Granny, letting Coco into the garden for his bed-time run, paying a dull call—suddenly the thought of Don somewhere, loving her, would spring up like a flame and leave her trembling. A thousand times she would say to herself: "Don will laugh at that!" or "Don will understand."

The difficulty was that often Don neither laughed nor understood.

She told herself that it was entirely unimportant that she and the man she was to marry never thought the same things were amusing. But it was daunting to have him say, when she had finished telling him a story that seemed to her entrancingly funny: "Well, go on, Honey, I'm listening." Her grandmother said: "Your young gentleman tells me his sense of humour will get him into trouble one of these days, Marigold, but happily I feel that he is in no imminent peril."

Don was fond of stories beginning: "Did you hear that one about Pat talking to Mike?" or, "It seems there was a Jew named Ikey——"

Then books. Poor Don! When they were first engaged Marigold, eager to share everything that made her shining inner life, had showered him with the books she loved best. Don said:

"You're a funny kid, Honey. All the books you like seem to be either sort of fairy tales for children, or else these morbid psycho-what's-its-name stuff with everybody analyzing every feeling they ever have, and never getting anywhere. Don't you like a book with a plot and a punch? Darn it, I like books, but I want a story, something to take my mind off my troubles. None of your highbrow stuff for me—that is, except Shakespeare, of course," he added dutifully.

"Pooh! Shakespeare! He's a very much over-rated author," said Marigold airily. "Anyone could write Shakespeare. I could myself. 'Fair frolic, pop-jowled Kate!' There's Shakespeare for you in one line, and I made *that* up! Then when you can't think of anything else to say, just have a Fool come on and sing 'Ding-a-dong, ding-a-dong.' Don't talk to me about *Shakespeare*!"

Donald used words and phrases from which Marigold winced away as though they had been blows. She told herself that she was morbid, over-fastidious, but she braced herself tensely when he boasted to

her, as he was fond of doing, that he was "a regular he-man"; when he asked her how "the head" was; or mentioned "the little mother"; or spoke of "sensing" things.

His clothes worried her, sometimes. Nothing important, a belt where a coat would have been better plain, a too-fancy touch to an evening waistcoat. "I'm as bad as Ada Dunham with her ecstasies over Mr. Thompson's marvellous taste," she thought.

Then he recited.

She had not known about that. They went to dinner at Edgar Hopper's, and afterwards Edgar said: "Recite something, old top," and Don had recited.

He gave them some of Mr. Robert Service's poems, full of strong men and guts and God's Great Out-Doors: he gave them a pathetic-humorous dialect poem about his "leetle Rosa": he gave them "Gunga Din", with gestures, dramatic pauses, enormous quantities of "expression." It was incredible.

Marigold felt sick with embarrassment. Afterwards they all motored to a dance. His hand found hers as they sat in the back seat of Edgar's car, he laced his fingers through hers. "You didn't say whether you liked the way I recited," he said. "Did you, Marigold? I wanted you to like it."

She felt like a grave, tender mother, who with protective deception answers her wistful little boy.

But when, reassured, he began to boast, she hated him.

“Funny thing, everyone seems crazy about my reciting—I’m just telling you because it appeals to my sense of humour, to have them acting as if it was something wonderful. I used to think some of going on the stage, but I don’t know——. I never took a lesson in elocution, didn’t seem to need it, somehow. I just sort of sense the character, and then I feel as if I *was* whoever’s supposed to be talking. Now take that place in *Gunga Din* where I say——”

She could only see his face dimly in the starlight, but she knew how it looked as he talked, the complacent lips, the cheeks seeming to grow slightly fuller. He was a stranger to her, and she withdrew into herself, bitter and hard against him.

It was the first dance they had been to together. People stopped to look at them as they danced, both so beautiful, lifting and falling like a wave, his dark head bent above her sun-bright one. Marigold wore a silvery dress that night, with a close sheathing bodice, and a full skirt that sprang away from her slender waist like the skirt of a young Infanta; Granny had lent her old-fashioned ear-rings of seed-pearls that swayed from her little ears.

She danced with Edgar Hopper, while Don glowered in the doorway. He cut in before the dance was over. “Come outside,” he said.

"Marigold, I don't want you to dance with any one but me to-night."

"Why, *Don*, that's crazy!"

"You haven't any corsets on. It's disgusting. You don't know how men talk."

"I think it's *you* who are disgusting, *Don*. I never wore stays in my life. I don't for a minute believe they think about it one way or the other. Everyone isn't thinking about my *body* every minute—*oh*—!"

"And you've put rouge on your cheeks."

"I *haven't*!" said Marigold, who had.

"And those damned ear-rings—I hate them. Everybody's looking at you. I saw the men's eyes crawling over you like filthy slimy snails."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about me—!"

Her voice shook so that she could not go on. Her pride failed her, she burst into tears. His arms were around her, he, too, was trembling all over, he was murmuring broken words, his lips against her hair.

"Precious Lamb! Oh, forgive me! Marigold, Marigold, I'm a damned fool! Speak to me, baby, tell me you forgive me. I'm the damnedest rotter that ever lived, to say what I did—but God knows it's only because I love you so. My little angel from heaven—!"

As he strained her against the hardness of his body, she felt herself coming back to him from far

away. But on another night she sat on the edge of her bed and said aloud:

“I don’t love Don any more. I’ve stopped loving Don.”

However, unhappy as she was, Marigold was Marigold, and as long as she could dramatize herself, she could still get some measure of enjoyment out of life. In her own room, with the door locked against a surprise visit from Granny, she was Marigold the Bride. She put a brass curtain-ring on her finger, and whispered to herself: “She wore no jewelry except her wedding-ring.” Marigold lifted her white hand, bare except for the plain gold band. “Young Mrs. Boynton——.”

She grew thinner and her eyes were big and shadowed. She realized, not without satisfaction, that she was looking wistful and pathetic. Once or twice, when Don was expected, she had added a little to the shadows, by means of a burnt cork. She would have preferred “violet shadows”, but she felt doubtful about the effect of water-colours on her skin, and had nothing else to use. Don loved her so when she looked fragile and exhausted, and in need of protection; and although she no longer loved him, she was not ready to have him stop loving her.

She put pressed pansies and bits of fern and autumn leaves into her books of poetry, opposite pencil-marked poems about sorrow and selflessness,

which she felt were particularly applicable to herself.

"I'm bored to death with the pair of you," old Mrs. Trent said one day, unexpectedly. "You mooning about with your eyes as big as saucers, and your young man snorting fire from his nostrils. Get married as soon as possible. I'll give you my blessing and a check, and go to Paris to live."

"Oh, Granny, I'm not in any hurry!" cried Marigold breathlessly.

"Well, I can't say I would be either, if I were in your boots, but although *you* may not be, I am. I have a chance to sell this house, and I'm tired of America. No, let the sacrifice take place as quickly as possible. Go and write to your adored one that Granny, the Hard-Hearted Monster, has yielded to your prayers."

A letter from Don was waiting in the hall, as Marigold slowly went through it to her room. She hoped it would make her less numb; but it was not very satisfactory. Young Mr. Boynton had been moved to "play-pretend", as Miss Hopper would say, that he was an Indian Rajah, and his Marigold a beautiful nautch girl. His letter, a trifle unsound geographically, was liberally sprinkled with unacknowledged quotations from the little mother's gramophone record of "O Moon of My Delight." Marigold, having read it, felt profoundly depressed.

CHAPTER VI

MARIGOLD PUTS ON HER WEDDING-GOWN AND TAKES IT OFF AGAIN

THE wedding was only three days away.

Marigold, in a panic, felt that it had stolen up on her while her attention was distracted by new clothes, by gifts, by letters. There it waited, three days away. Her wedding-dress had come home, and occupied the guest-room bed, spread out in strange shining loveliness. The library was full of glass bowls and silver hot-water jugs and bronze book-ends. Granny had a new gown; and Granny's friend, the Bishop, was coming to marry Don and Marigold in three days. Three days. Three days.

The clocks said it. The dripping tap in the bathroom said it. Three days.

Edgar Hopper was to be best man, and Donald and Mrs. Boynton were to stay with the Hoppers. Mrs. Trent had read Mrs. Boynton's rather gushing letters coldly, and had decided to be too old and infirm to have guests stopping in the house. But on the way from the train to the Hoppers they were to call on her; and on the afternoon of their arrival she took to her bed and, from it directed the setting of the scene.

“The whole effect must be feeble, aged, and intensely Christian,” she said. “I really am not strong enough to have a woman in the house who knows she is going to love me without ever having laid eyes on me, but on the other hand I don’t want to hurt her feelings, so I must look very delicate. You’d better put the Degas lady under the bed for the moment, Marigold, and lend me one of your pictures to put in her place—something very pure, preferably angels, shouldn’t you think? And put my dear little books under the bed, too—wait a minute, leave out ‘My Past’, and I can pop it under my pillow when she comes. Now what by the bedside of the Agéd Christian, should you say? The Bible would be a little too obvious, wouldn’t it? Or wouldn’t it?”

“Oh, Granny!” sighed Marigold, laughing helplessly, but heavy-hearted too.

“A bit obvious, I’m afraid. Thomas à Kempis would be better; Thomas à Kempis and my Prayer Book, at the back of the bottom bureau drawer, or if they’re not there, they’ll be in the guest-room desk. And something else, a good solid touch—let me see——”

She lit a cigarette, and considered. “Mrs. Humphry Ward, I think. Yes. We have some of the woman somewhere about, haven’t we? Then the violets over under Grandpapa’s picture, except for one or two in a glass here by me and Mrs. Ward

and Thomas à K. Just a few flowers by one's bed always look so devout, somehow, although I'm sure I can't say why. Marigold, my dear, it's perfect! I never felt such a Sweet Old Thing in my life. I really think I must have the Bishop up to see me before we change back to normal, he would be so edified. Oh, damn——!"

"What's the matter, Granny?"

"I've burnt a hole in my peignoir with this cigarette—never mind. You can't blame an Agéd Christian for smoking stupidly. Now run off and meet your train, and when you bring your belle-mère back, all this is going to my head so that you'll probably find me shouting hymns at the top of my lungs."

Marigold stood on the station platform and watched the train pulling in, while her heart thudded sickeningly, and she longed to hide where they could never find her again. Why had she come to meet this stranger and his mother? She felt naked and ashamed, and her knees trembled. Then she saw them; Don looking nervous and unfamiliar in a new hat, helping his mother down the steps, taking bags and hat-boxes from the porter, and not seeing her. Gathering all her strength together, she went up behind them, and said shakily:

"Hello!"

Don turned at her voice. "Marigold! Why, Honey, I never of thought of such luck as your

coming down to the station. Mother! Mother, here's Marigold——!"

"There was another bag, porter, black leather—no, it didn't have any mark, but you *must* find it. So this is Marigold! Just a moment, dear, the porter's lost my black grip. Donald, the porter's lost my black grip, you must *do* something about it, it has my gloves and my slippers and my aspirin and *everything*—oh, I think that woman has it! Porter! Porter! I think that woman has it! Donald, I think that woman——"

Donald tore his eyes from Marigold. "What, Mother? Oh, the chauffeur took your bag. Everything's all right, and here's *Marigold*."

Relieved of anxiety about her luggage, Mrs. Boynton kissed Marigold warmly. "So this is Marigold!" she said again. "So this is the dear little daughter-to-be! Well! Well, here we are!"

They got into the motor the Hoppers had sent, Mrs. Boynton sitting between Don and Marigold, holding a hand of each. Under the brown and fawn plumes of her hat her big brown eyes were tense, and her skin was lined and creased from nervousness. Sitting between her son and his fiancée, she was experiencing complex emotions. Love for Donald was the greatest, and desire for his happiness, but almost as great was unwilling jealousy of Marigold. She would never again be first in the heart of her boy, her little baby. Tears of self-pity

welled into her eyes. She did not realize that she had not been first for a good many years. She almost hated Marigold; and at the same time, for Donald's sake and for her own appealing sweetness, she almost loved her. And over these conflicting feelings flowed a stream of surface thoughts that poured out into words.

"I don't think I should have known you from Son's description, dear. Well! Doesn't it all seem strange! And how is the dear Grandmother? I'm ashamed to have her see me this way, I feel so messy from the sleeper. I really never shut my eyes once last night; just as I'd get used to going we'd stop, and then just as I'd get used to *stopping*, we'd *go*—oh, *mercy*! Goodness, I thought the shofer was going to run down that dog! My heart's beating so! Feel my heart, Donald! What was I telling you? Oh, yes, the sleeper—oh, Donny, that reminds me, how much did you give the porter? I hope you didn't give him more than a quarter, but I know you did, you really are foolish about it, and they respect you a lot more if you don't give too much—he didn't deserve anything, he was so saucy—Son, tell him not to go so fast! Yes, he *is*, it makes me so nervous, and besides, it's my best hat—"

She turned towards Marigold. "Of course my *dress* is in my trunk, but Miss Lindquist, she's my milliner, advised me to *wear my hat*—"

"It's a lovely hat," said Marigold. She felt as if she were floating in a dream, far away from reality. They reached the house and went in, a man and his mother and dreaming Marigold.

Granny, the Agéd Christian, propped up among her pillows, looked almost transparent as she welcomed them, but she retained enough strength to withdraw her hand definitely from Mrs. Boynton's clinging clasp. "Well, here we are!" her guest announced again. "But we'll just stay a minute—mustn't tire the Sick-a-Bed-Lady!" (Marigold saw a faint spasm cross her grandmother's face.) "I ought to know how to act in a sick-room, if having been there enough myself has anything to do with it! You can imagine when I tell you I was two months in the hospital after my operation, and for one whole month they never knew from day to day whether I was going to live or die. Dr. Hughes—he was my physician—said to me, 'You've been a *very* sick woman, Mrs. Boynton,' and I think that means a whole lot from a doctor, don't you, they get so hardened to human suffering, of course it's only natural they should, seeing so much of it all around them all the time; but I never lost courage, I think that has everything to do with it, don't you, Mrs. Trent? What's that poem you used to say, Donald, about the man who's worth while is the man who can smile when everything goes wrong?"

"*'Dead wrong'*," Don murmured. He looked

tired; traveling with Mrs. Boynton was not too easy.

“Well, I just tried to live up to that—days I was feeling worst, I’d try to have some little joke or riddle or something to say to make the doctor laugh; he used to call me his ‘Tonic’, it got to be quite a nickname for me. Miss Hoffman, she was my nurse, a very sweet girl from Denver, she said to me one day, ‘Mrs. Boynton, you’re a regular sermon, always so cheerful no matter what you’re suffering!’ Well, that made me laugh, it was so absurd; as I said to Miss Hoffman, ‘Why, Miss Hoffman, it’s just what *anyone* would do.’”

“You look very well and strong now,” said Mrs. Trent unkindly.

Mrs. Boynton gave a slight annoyed laugh. “Well, I may *look* all right, but you don’t get your strength back very soon after an operation like mine, you know. There’re some days still when I feel so weak, I have sort of dizzy spells, and if I overdo I’m just as apt to have to go to bed. Doctor Hughes warned me, he said when any one had been through the siege I’d been through, they couldn’t be too careful about overdoing. You see it was my stomach, I couldn’t keep anything on it except white of egg beaten up light with a little brandy—”. She added a few details.

“Then I’m sure you should rest now,” said Mrs.

Trent. "It was most kind of you to spare a few moments to an old woman——"

"Old woman!" shrieked Mrs. Boynton. "Goodness! I hope *you* don't call yourself old! Now, Marigold, you'll have to scold Grandma if she talks nonsense like that! Why, Mrs. Trent, you're just the image of the dearest little lady at home, you know, Donald, Grandma Barrett, and every one *always* speaks of her as being eighty years *young*."

This tactful speech did not seem to have quite the cheering effect that was intended. Marigold, catching Granny's look of frozen fury, suggested that tea would be ready in the drawing-room.

"Oh, I don't really care for any tea, dear, it's so late, it would spoil my dinner."

"Come and watch us spoil ours, then," said Don. "Come on, Mother, and Marigold will show you the wedding presents, won't you, Honey?"

"No, you two run along together. I know when three's a crowd, so I'll just stay and have a nice little visit with Grandma."

The Agéd Christian's expression said plainer than words: "Get her out! Get her out!" Marigold tried again:

"I want to show you my wedding dress, too, Mrs. Boynton. And I want to ask hundreds of questions about Don."

Don pulled his mother out of her chair. "You come and see Marigold tackle the tea-pot, Mrs.

F. H. Boynton," he said. "She's the greatest little tea-pot tipper in the known world. Come on, quick, or I'll sit on your new hat!"

"Oh, Donny! Mercy! Isn't he *awful?*?" she appealed to Mrs. Trent. "You'll get a nice idea of *me*, with Donald pulling me round this way! All right, children, I'm coming!" She added in a roguish stage whisper: "I just want to tell you I think a certain little girl not a thousand miles away is one perfect *sweetheart*, but don't you tell her I said so!"

In the drawing-room all three relaxed. Mrs. Boynton was induced to take off her hat, and put her feet up on the sofa in front of the fire, and even accepted a cup of tea: "Very, very weak, dear, three lumps and lemon; my tea's always a great joke at home. Remember how Papa used to call it 'hot lemonade', Donny? Well, Marigold, your grandmother certainly is a dear little old lady! Wasn't it funny, the way she and I took to each other from the start? Some people you do feel that way about. I hope she didn't mind my coming off with you children. She's just like a little Dresden China tea-cup, isn't she?"

Crimson tulips standing in bowls about the room caught her attention. "Your flowers are very pretty," she said: "I wonder—no, I won't say it! No, really, it wasn't anything—oh, I wish I hadn't spoken! But I was just wondering, Donald, if they

would just possibly give me my rose-cold—I don't believe——”

“Oh, I'll have them taken out!” cried Marigold.

“Nonsense, Mother, these aren't roses. You never heard of tulip-cold any more than of geranium-cold or violet-cold or—what's another flower, Marigold?”

“Marigold-cold.”

“Or orchid-cold.”

“Or lily-of-the-valley-cold.”

“Or potato-blossom-cold.”

“Or anemone-japonica-cold.”

“Get out! Where does *he* work? Or—my flowers are running out—whole-wheat flour-cold.”

Mrs. Boynton beamed at them while sentimental tears rolled down her cheeks. “Oh, you two dears!” she said. “It's so wonderful to hear you talking together so sweetly and brightly, it's just the way you said it was, Son! Just go on as if I wasn't here, I love to listen to you!” She settled herself to the enjoyment of more brightness.

Marigold was flooded with embarrassment; and yet, out of sight of Granny's critical eye, she was enjoying her new rôle of the Perfect Daughter-in-Law. Sweet and gentle, elated by Mrs. Boynton's approval and Don's adoration, she poured tea, put the fire-screen where it would shield Mrs. Boynton's eyes, laughed at her little jokes, appealed to her for

advice which she had no intention of taking. When Mrs. Boynton dropped a piece of buttered tea-cake on her brown satin breast, and dabbed at it with her napkin, peering downward with indrawn chin, Don whispered to Marigold under cover of his mother's preoccupation: "You've certainly made one life-sized hit with Mother, you little peaches-and-cream."

She felt real affection for her. But Granny, rejoined after the Boyntons had gone, did not share her feelings.

"Lord, what a woman! Give me some *strong* tea—no, really black—with a great deal of rum in it. So the doctor said she was his Tonic, did he? I'll be bound she was, and a good stiff dose, too! Pfui! Did you hear the creature being tactful to me, in my own house? Eighty years young indeed——! How can you stand it, child?"

"She was nicer downstairs, Granny. She thought you were lovely. She liked us so much, and she thought we liked her, and she's so proud of Don. It's quite touching somehow. I liked her, truly——"

"If you did, it only shows what an unspeakable horror you were expecting," said Granny crossly. "Sick-a-Bed-Lady, indeed! Good heavens! She really *has* made me ill. I feel *very* ill. Tell Mary she will have to make me a cocktail before dinner. Eighty years young——!"

Marigold, alone, after the little glow of excitement had died down, said to herself, as she had said a hundred times:

“I have to tell Don I can’t marry him. I’m afraid—I’m afraid—! I can’t marry Don.”

She had gone through sick days and nights since she had faced the fact that she no longer loved Don—that she had never really loved him. But what she had felt had been a sort of drugged despair. She had not been able to bring herself to tell him the truth; she could not shake off her life-long habit of making the expected gesture, of saying the words that would give pleasure. Unfortunately for Donald and Marigold, they had never had a real quarrel; and many times when they should have faced the truth, when their different view-points, striking together, might have kindled a light that would have shown them their position clearly, Marigold had thought to herself:

“We have never quarreled—it would be too terrible to begin now.”

So she would choose the easier way, answering Don softly, hiding her real feelings, agreeing with him, sinking back into the soft smothering illusion of perfect understanding.

But now she awoke from her dream. The dull pain changed to pangs of keenest torture, as she realized that she was not some one in a feverish dream, but wide awake in a moving world. She

could not marry Don, and she could not tell him so. Sitting up in bed, holding her hot head with shaking ice-cold hands, she wondered if she was going mad. Her dress—the presents coming—the answers to the invitations—made it so terribly definite.

The day before the wedding she and Don were alone together in the library. She had said: "I must show you the lamp that Mrs. Humphreys sent," but when they were in the library, they did not look at the presents. He drew her down beside him on a sofa, and kissed her, slowly, gently, tenderly; she thought it was almost as if he were sorry for her. Something in her heart said: "You must tell him now that you aren't going to marry him after all."

Her voice sounded far away. "Don," she said, "I have to tell you something. I—I can't——"

The telephone on the desk at her elbow rang officiously. She tried to go on, but it was impossible. She rose, and picked up the receiver; Ada Dunham was calling her.

"I just *know* you're blessing me for ringing up, when you're probably rushed to death, but I just rang up to ask if you found time to go and look at that warming-pan at Shorter's. Mr. Thompson was asking if you'd let me know yet whether the warming-pan appealed to you, you know you're so *artistic*, we'd hate to give you anything that wasn't really out of the ordinary, so I said, 'It seems *awful* to ask her to go and look at a present and probably see the

price, and that might make her worried for fear it was too much—not that I mean that it *is*, Miss Trent, but anyway, Mr. Thompson and myself wanted to make sure of giving you something that would *appeal*—”

“It’s lovely; of course I went to see it,” said poor Marigold. She wanted to scream into the telephone: “Don’t send me a present—there isn’t going to be a wedding!”

“Of course, if you’d rather have something else, Miss Trent, why, Mr. Thompson and myself would be only too pleased if you would just say so, very very frankly, but personally, when I saw that warming-pan I said to Mr. Thompson, ‘Kenneth, that warming-pan just *looks* like Miss Trent,’ really, that was the way we both felt, it was quite odd—”

Her voice went on and on, while Marigold made banal replies. “It’s perfectly *lovely*,” she heard herself saying; “It’s so *good* of you and Mr. Thompson. Don and I *do* appreciate it.”

“—because we feel you’re always so *safe* with an antique, I don’t know what it is about them, exactly—but Mr. Thompson is quite an authority, you know, and really he says this is a very delightful specimen. Not that I want to blow my own horn, Miss Trent!”

Polite laughter. “It’s perfectly *lovely*. Don and I—”

“So I knew you wouldn’t think it was queer if I

just rang up and asked you very very frankly——”

Don, sitting close to where Marigold stood with the telephone in her hand, lifted a fold of her dress, and buried his face in it. She looked down with wet eyes on his dark bowed head, so unsuspecting, so defenceless. She thought then that she could never tell him that she had stopped loving him. But that evening the courage of desperation came to her. Granny was in bed, and Marigold was alone. Donald had said good-bye to her that afternoon, until they should meet the next day at their wedding; but she knew at last that she must tell him the truth.

She called the Hopper house on the telephone, and Mrs. Hopper answered:

“Yes, dear, I’ll call him. The boys are going to the Club for dinner, you know, but they haven’t started yet. How are you, dear? Getting pretty thrilled? How’s Grandmother’s cold? Oh, that’s too bad. Now, be sure to let us know if there’s anything at all we can do.”

Marigold’s teeth were chattering with nervousness, and the blood roared in her ears. It seemed forever before Mrs. Hopper said: “Just a minute till I call Donald.” She could hear a gramophone playing; then Don’s voice calling some laughing reply before it said into the telephone, suddenly sounding very close:

“Hello, Honey! Want me?”

"Don—can you come over here? Now—right away? I must see you."

"Why, I'd love to, dear, but we're just starting for the Club. You know I'm giving a dinner for the ushers. Can't you tell me what it is over the phone?"

"No, Don, I can't—please come! Please!"

"But listen, Hon', you understand, don't you—?"

"Oh, Don, yes, I do, I do understand, but it is desperately important—" She was crying so that she could hardly articulate. She said:

"Don, I implore you to come!"

"I'll be right over," he said briefly. When he came, she drew back from his arms, and, lifting to him her swollen, discoloured face and her eyes almost blind with tears, said without preface:

"I've stopped loving you. I can't marry you."

The relief that swept over his anxious face was almost ludicrous. "Oh, Marigold!" he said, "I thought something really was the matter! Come here to me, baby!"

She stared at him in astonishment. "Don," she whispered, "Didn't you understand what I said? I don't love you any more."

"Come and sit down here, dear. No, I won't touch you if you don't want me to, but just let me wipe your poor little wet face." He wiped away the tears with his big cool handkerchief, gently, and put a cushion behind her. "I'm going to light the

fire," he said. "You teeth are chattering, and your little hands are like lumps of ice. Now then, let's hear all about it."

"But, Don—I don't want you to be good to me. I'm not hysterical. I don't love you—I can't marry you, Don. You don't want me to marry you if I don't love you, do you, Don? You don't understand. I just want you to hate me—to hate me and go away."

He let her finish and then said:

"Honey, don't you know that every girl feels this way before she's married? There isn't one in a million who doesn't—I swear to you that there isn't. I swear it, Marigold. You're tired and nervous, and your grandmother has been working on your feelings. It's God's truth that you're only feeling what almost every woman in the world feels just before she's married."

"No, Don, no! Please don't make me marry you—Don—please—please——!"

"Who's the man?" he asked cynically, his voice and expression changing suddenly.

"Nobody. I just don't want to be married—ever—ever—to anybody——"

"Then what have you been reading?" He knew Marigold better than she realized.

"Nothing. But I don't love you."

"Marigold, you don't know what you're talking

about. You do love me. You couldn't love me this afternoon and stop loving me this evening."

"But I didn't love you this afternoon—I haven't loved you for months——"

"You gave a pretty damned good imitation of it, then. What's the idea of waiting until now to spring the news?"

"I tried to tell you, Don,—truly, truly I did—but——"

"But what?"

"I couldn't bear to hurt you," she said feebly.

He gave a bitter laugh. "Oh, thank you very much. Very kind of you. So, in order not to hurt me, you wait until the day before our wedding, and then say, 'Oh, by the way, I'm not going to marry you—just thought I'd mention it.' Well, I congratulate you, my dear. You've made a damned fool out of me, which I suppose was your idea."

"Don—Don——"

"Now, if you'll excuse me, if you've quite finished being kind, I'll go and tell my friends the news, and we'll all laugh our heads off. The joke certainly is on me——"

His bitter voice broke; he lit a cigarette with a hand that shook, took one puff, hurled it savagely into the fire, and, putting his head down on the mantel-piece, began to cry with great tearing sobs. Terrified, she touched his arm timidly. He turned and caught her to him fiercely, crushing her; his hot

lips fastened to hers. Presently he picked her up in his arms, and carried her to the sofa. Kneeling beside her, with his arms about her, he said in a broken voice:

“Marigold, you must marry me. It doesn’t matter if you don’t love me now, I swear before God that it doesn’t. When we are married I’ll teach you to love me—only believe me, my little one. I love you as no woman ever was loved before. I tell you the plain truth, Marigold, when I say that unless I can have you I don’t want to live. That’s the way I love you. If you tell me, now, that you won’t marry me, that’s all right, darling, I’ll understand and say good luck and God bless you—but I won’t care enough about living, without you, to go on with it any more, that’s all.”

Utterly spent, she let him bury his stricken face against her breast. Her one great effort to be true to herself and to him had come to nothing, and she could not pursue it further. After this she would just seem to be what he wanted her to be.

He lifted his face. “You do believe me, darling?”

“Yes, Don.”

“I’ll be so good to you, little Marigold.”

“I know.”

“Give me your lips—my own——”

Donald and Marigold’s wedding day.

It was a grey day, bitter cold, with sleet slanting in white lines, and clicking against the windows. In the black garden the folded snowdrops shivered. Marigold opened her eyes.

She had not expected to go to sleep all night, but already it was eight o'clock, and Mary was knocking, and asking if she would like her breakfast in bed. As she sat up drinking her tea and eating her toast, she looked around her room. She tried to have appropriate feelings about her little bed, the wigless doll, the view of pine boughs from her window; she said to herself: "The last time!" But she had no real feeling about it. It seemed just like any ordinary morning, only breakfast in bed was rather a treat. She was surprised at, and a little ashamed of her appetite, and wished that Mary had put marmalade on the tray. However, she had not, and Marigold felt that it would not be at all the proper thing to ask for it.

She got up, and put on the shabby old bath-robe that she would never wear again. She could see her new dressing-gown, frilled and pink as a sea-shell, lying in her half-packed bag.

Granny was in bed, saving herself for the afternoon. She really had a bad cold, and looked old and frail. Downstairs, Miss Hopper was bustling about, and as Marigold came down the stairs, she burst into the Wedding March, beating time with the dust-pan and brush she held.

“Dum *dum* de *dum*, Dum *dum* de *dum*! Good morning, little Bride! The top of the mornin’ to yez, darlint. And how is the girlie feeling this morning? Pretty sad, I guess, or else not, as the boys say! Now, Lady Mine, come and see how we’ve fixed the flowers, an it please your ladyship.”

There were daffodils everywhere, great starry clusters of them; a Milky Way of daffodils.

People talked to Marigold in the tone of voice that seems to be reserved for brides and the dangerously ill. Her flowers from Don came, wax-white gardenias; and Marigold heard Mary whisper: “Sure, they smell like a funeral.” Lunch was announced.

“Goodness Gracious Agnes!” screamed Miss Hopper. “I had no *idea* it was so late! No, dearie, I won’t stay to lunch, thank you muchly. The weddin’s only—let’s see, one to two is one, two, three, —three hours off, and though the little Bridie may not think it, even an old school-marm wants to do some prinking. No, honey-bunch, I’ll absquatulate! But I’ll be there, waiting at the Church, waiting at the Church, waiting at the Church——!” She made her exit, singing loudly.

Marigold lunched on tea and cooling Irish stew. She wished she might read a book as she ate, but she felt that she must try to appear like a proper bride before Mary, who kept stealing curious

glances at her. As she was finishing her lunch, the telephone rang. It was Donald who wanted to speak to her.

“Just wanted to hear your voice, dear, and ask how you’re feeling.”

“I’m all right, Don.”

“I couldn’t go to sleep last night, could you?”

She could not tell him that she had slept all the night through as sweetly and deeply as a good baby, so she answered:

“No, I couldn’t either.”

“Well—everything all right, darling?”

“Everything’s all right, Donny,” she said, but, to her own surprise, her voice caught in a sudden sob.

“Marigold, it will be, I promise you it will be!”

“Yes, I know.”

“Then good-bye, my precious—for a little while.”

“Good-bye.”

“Marigold!”

“Yes?”

“Good-bye——”

The caterer’s men came.

She stood by her window looking out at the storm. It would be nearly dark by four o’clock, but there were plenty of candles in the Church.

Granny sent in word that it was time she dressed.

She felt like someone else as she looked at herself in the mirror, dressed in shining folds, her train

sweeping away from her shoulders, her bright hair held close by the misty lace of her wedding-veil. A bride. But when she moved away, and no longer saw the white reflection, she was Marigold again—Marigold, who could not make herself feel like a bride.

Suddenly, panic seized her.

It was her wedding. She was caught. In a few minutes she would be married to Don for ever and ever. She threw herself on her bed, burying her face in the pillow to stifle the mad storm of weeping that shook her body. She cried in a strangled voice: "God, don't make me marry Don! Make something happen so I won't have to be married, God! Please! Please! Don't let me have to marry Don."

She lay, panting and broken, until the door opened. She thought it was Granny, come to say the motor was waiting; but it was Miss Hopper, dressed in her best, with her new toque like a pudding of pansies, and under it her face all mottled red and white, her nose red, her eyes red and swollen. Miss Hopper had been crying too.

"Why, Marigold, has somebody told you already?" she asked.

"Told me what?"

"About—about poor Donald?"

"No—no! What about him? What about him, Miss Hopper? What about him?"

"Hush, dear, hush! You must be very brave,

my poor little girl. Something terrible has happened, and you must try to be brave."

"Please go on—please, please!"

"Yes, dear, yes. The roads were so slippery with the sleet and Donald was driving so fast, I suppose—they think the car must have skidded, by the place on the bridge over the tracks, where the rails are down—anyway, it went over. Donald——"

Marigold said stupidly: "Don's dead." She thought Miss Hopper looked very silly, standing there opening and shutting her mouth like a fish, with no words coming out. Then, with the mouth still opening and shutting, the face spread out, grew enormous, came swimming through the darkness towards her.

CHAPTER VII

PANIC

OVER and over again, Marigold asked herself how Donald had died. Had it really been an accident, and was she set free? Or had he given her the gift of his life, and bound her to him forever? The question called to her by day and by night. Had he not really been sure that he could make her love him? He had said that without her he would not want to go on living. But then his voice in that last talk over the telephone had sounded so strong and happy. And the roads had been terribly dangerous, in the ice-storm of that day; there had been other accidents. Every one but Marigold was sure it was accidental. "Of course it was an accident," she said to herself. "Don wasn't the sort of person to kill himself. It was an accident."

But why had he gone off alone?

He and Edgar Hopper were to have been driven over in the limousine; but while Edgar was still in the tub, Donald had called through the bath-room door:

"Mind if I go on ahead, Ted? I'll wait for you in the church."

"You'll be an hour early, you Jackass!" his friend had roared, through gurglings and splashings.

"I know, but something might happen, and I don't want to keep my lady-friend waiting."

"Go ahead, it's your funeral, not mine, but you're a nut."

The chauffeur said: "Mr. Boynton asks could he have the little car, and off he goes all dressed up with a flower in his button-hole, sort of excited, but not any more than any gentleman would be goin' to get married, and I tell him to look out for skiddin', see, it was stormin' terrible, so he says all right, but I don't hardly think he took in how bad the roads was, anyway that's all I know, poor young gentleman."

"Terribly sad!" other people said. "Of course, he must have been drinking!"

Marigold had always cared most for him when he was away from her, when she had been able, unhindered by reality, to idealize him into her heart's desire. Now she missed him and wanted him, illogically longed for him to comfort her for the grief she felt in losing him. Sorrow and relief strove together in her heart.

She thought of him as she sat by her grandmother's bed through the slow hours, for Mrs. Trent was desperately ill; her cold had turned into pneumonia. She lay, small and wasted, in her big bed,

talking to shadows, giving orders to servants dead for years, trying to sing snatches of forgotten songs. Her eyes blazed with fever; she did not see Marigold or Miss Hopper or the trained nurse; she saw the friends who came to welcome her, young ladies in crinoline and pork-pie hats, young gentlemen with side-whiskers and peg-top trousers. Cold rain clicked on the windows, but Granny and her friends were in a garden where roses bloomed and strawberries were ripe. Across fifty years, two little shades trotted back, and Granny's spirit heard them scratching at her door. "Carlo! Floss!" she called. "Good doggies, then!" She tried to lift her tired hand to pat them.

Marigold could not leave her to go back with Mrs. Boynton to Donald's funeral; she sat in the sick-room, her tired brain turning in its circle. "Don—Don! How did you die? Why did I tell you I didn't love you? I've killed you. Granny—oh, poor Granny! Don—"

Mrs. Trent died towards dawn on the tenth day after Donald's death.

Life to Marigold became like a bright, shifting kaleidoscope; a thing of small separate happenings, clear and hard. Granny in her coffin, looking as if she were made of yellow wax; Granny's little feet in black satin slippers; a smell of baking bread; a voice saying, "Poor child"; Coco scratching at Granny's door; violets tied with broad purple ribbon;

Heathcliff and Trillium shouting their songs and scattering their seed, just as if nothing had happened; violets and palms; voices saying, "Poor child"; opening a closet door and suddenly coming upon her wedding-dress; the Bishop coming, and having to have some lunch.

Presently the Church where she and Don were to have been married, and the choir singing "Peace, Perfect Peace." Then the drive to the grave, and standing in the cold drizzle, while the Bishop read:

"Man, that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay."

The words were read for Granny; but they really belonged to Don—more to Don than to any one else who had ever died.

"Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts——"

Don! Don!

Then home again to a house swept and shining and empty. Coming in, feeling hungry and sleepy, and ashamed of feeling either.

And then what?

Mrs. Trent's lawyer came to talk to Marigold. She tried to listen intelligently, but she had never understood figures, and she felt as if she were in a coma. She heard words, but they meant nothing to

her. She was so tired that her one thought was to have Mr. Park finish talking and go: she sat very straight, forcing a look of bright intentness to her face, pretending to understand. By the time he went, she did understand one thing—that she would have almost no money. Granny's annuity ceased at her death, and she had saved practically nothing. The house must be sold, and what would Marigold do then?

As Mr. Park droned on, silly words sang in her head: "And what will poor Robin do then? Poor thing!" She had no near relations; she could not settle down on distant cousins that she had only seen once or twice in her life.

Miss Hopper had paid her twenty-five dollars a month for teaching in the little school. That was wealth when she had used it for books or marron glacés or a new blouse; but, vague as she was about money matters, even Marigold realized that it would be nothing when she had to pay for lodging and food and clothes. Hoping against hope that she might be given extra work to do at the school, and earn more, she approached Miss Hopper, who said:

"I'm dreffle, dreffle sorry, childie, but, you see, a long time ago, when you said you weren't coming back, I engaged another girlie who's had special training, and I'm afraid there isn't any place at school for you."

She thought of trying to get a position as a com-

panion or as a governess, but she did not know how to go about it. She had had no training that would fit her to earn more than starvation wages. She was possessed by inhibitions; confused and helpless, and terribly alone.

Mrs. Boynton had felt toward Marigold all the jealousy that is natural for the mother of an only son to feel towards the woman he loves. She had made up her mind, from the day Don had told her of his engagement, that Marigold was unworthy of him, and that she did not appreciate him and the honour he was doing her in choosing her to be his wife. "The letters she writes me seem *cold*, Donny," she complained. "They don't seem to show any real *feeling*. And when I think what I've been through with you, what I've suffered for your sake, it just seems as if I *couldn't* give you up to a little thing who acts just about as cool as a cucumber. Well—I don't know that I have any reason to expect her to show any feeling—after all, no one *feels* like a mother——"

"And thank the Lord Marigold isn't that! Not yet," said Don.

"Oh, Son, you know I hate fault-finding, and criticizing, but that's another thing——"

"What? That Marigold isn't a mother? Give the poor child time."

"Donald! I don't like to hear you talking that

flippant way about a sacred subject. No, Son, I mean, of course I don't know Marigold yet—(*Marigold!* What a name! What possessed them?)—but you can tell a lot by letters and photographs, and she seems so *young* and sort of—well—well, anyway, I mean is she just the mother you want for your kiddies?"

"You bet she is."

"Well—you needn't look so cross, Donald, it was just she seems so young——"

She said to her friends: "Anyone of forty girls right here in town I'd have *gladly* welcomed as a daughter, but no, Donald has to go off and find a perfect stranger no one's ever set eyes on! I don't know what possessed him!"

But when she met Marigold she was relieved: she was a sweet little thing, after all: not the cold scheming creature Mrs. Boynton had feared. She was jealous of her youth and beauty, but she felt affection for her, too. Here, she thought, was a child who would be glad of advice and direction, who would look to her for help. Already in her imagination she was choosing the wall papers for the new home with Marigold, teaching her to cook Donald's favorite dishes, even holding Donald's firstborn—and incidentally Marigold's—in her arms. Marigold's gentle deference made her feel once more that she was of the first importance in Donald's life, and, feeling so, her heart was warm with affection.

“She’s a dear little biddable soul,” she thought fondly.

Later, when she made some suggestions for the approaching wedding, it was a surprise to find the dear little biddable soul had quite definite ideas of her own. Mrs. Boynton had said, as she sipped her hot water and lemon: “I went to the sweetest wedding last week, with *such* a pretty feature, I thought right away, wouldn’t that be nice for *the* wedding! Right before the service, but when the bride and groom had come in—it was Helen Foss and Nelson Skinner, you know, Donny—Mrs. McKim—she’s a woman at home with a very fine voice, Marigold—she sang the sweetest song, every one spoke of it, they said in the account of the wedding in the Press that it was called ‘A Birthday’; that sounds sort of funny for a wedding-day, but still it came out all right by saying it was her birthday on account of her love coming to her, although it starts in rather queerly about her heart being like a water-spout——”

“‘A watered *shoot*,’” said Marigold softly:

“‘My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit.’”

“Why, you know it! Isn’t that a coincidence! How did the very end go, about the birthday? You remember, I was trying to tell you, Son?”

““Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.””

She could not bear the look in Don’s eyes; she added hastily: “It’s Christina Rossetti’s, you know.”

“Is it? Are you sure? I had an idea it was Carrie Jacobs Bond. It has a sort of a swing like ‘The End of a Perfect Day.’ Well, no matter. But I was thinking, that’s just the thing for Donald and Marigold to have sung at *their* wedding.”

But the dear little biddable soul had said no, politely and regretfully, but definitely. It had been rather surprising. And other suggestions had met with the same result—a suggestion as to carrying the ring in the heart of a white rose—a suggestion as to a delicious drink for the wedding reception, made of grapejuice and cucumbers.

However, that probably was due to old Mrs. Trent. Donald had never approved of her influence over her granddaughter.

When Marigold was left alone, Mrs. Boynton was filled with pity for her. Her own house was sad and empty, and she thought that it would be a comfort to have some one with her. She could easily afford it; her husband had left her well provided for. Marigold was quiet and gentle; she would be very little trouble, and she would always be there to talk about Donald, or go shopping, or play a game of Double Dummy Four Hundred. She herself was hardly aware of her real reason

for wanting Marigold to live with her. Subconsciously, she was set, hard as flint, against any other man possessing what Donald had wanted. Every primitive instinct in her was bent on keeping for her young what had been his, even though now he was dead; and it would be far easier to do this with Marigold under her eyes.

"I want you to come and fill Son's empty place, dear," she wrote to Marigold. "Somewhere our boy is loving us both still, I know, and it would be his wish that this should be Home to his little girl. I'm very lonely without my boy, and you would be helping me as much as I would be helping you. We'll cling together and comfort each other."

It was hard for Marigold to know what to do; she had always depended on the decisions of other people, first her father's, then her grandmother's. She asked Miss Hopper's advice, Mr. Park's, other friends of Mrs. Trent's. They were anxious to have her definitely settled, and off their minds. It made them uncomfortable to think of her, lonely and bewildered; so they strongly urged her to go to Mrs. Boynton.

Panic seized her. Mrs. Boynton's kindness seemed the only stable thing in a changing world.

She tried to look at the situation honestly, tried to turn an uncompromising light on her mental muddle. She was frightened and helpless. She was not a wild creature, loving freedom and ad-

venture; she needed friendly walls about her, her hearth rug, her basket, her saucer of milk. Mrs. Boynton was kind and motherly, and said she needed her. If Marigold had found a place as a companion, she would have been paid for doing all the things that she would do so much more eagerly for Mrs. Boynton. She would try hard to give more than she took; and at the same time she would do it so that Mrs. Boynton should always have the satisfaction of feeling herself the only benefactor.

She thought of the disadvantages of life with Mrs. Boynton, who was talkative, inquisitive, embarrassingly sentimental, and—Marigold was finding it hard to be highminded and truthful together—not quite of the Trents' social class. That thought, as always, aroused her loyalty to Don and to everyone who belonged to him; and not only did it arouse her loyalty and her protective instinct, but it did away with any feeling of fear of new circumstances, or lack of confidence in herself. After all—as Granny had so often reminded her—she was a Trent. And being a Trent meant that she had hidden treasure—love of beauty, of books, of nature; humour, and perception—that made all of her but her body independent forever. The uncompromising light wavered and grew dim as she viewed this pleasant picture with a slight complacence.

Then the light grew strong again, showing truly and clearly the one reason that made her sure that

she would go to Mrs. Boynton. Through dwelling on the question of Donald's death, she had grown to believe almost surely that he had killed himself. If he had done so, because she had told him she did not love him, she could see nothing else to do but to give up all the rest of her days to making his mother happy. It was one of the most sincere efforts of her life to do what was right.

If Don had died naturally, she could have chosen for herself. She had no idea what she could have done, but untrained people did earn their living; she could have coloured post-cards, perhaps, or assisted in an atmospheric tea-room somewhere. But then she would have been a free woman, with nothing on her conscience. She said to herself: "If I'd been truthful with Don in the first place, this never would have happened. I pose and pretend, and I know it, and I'm too much of a moral coward to stop it, and I've killed him. Wherever I am, and whatever I do, I suppose I'll keep on pretending, so I might as well do it with Mrs. Boynton, and pretend to her that she's making me perfectly happy."

But she was not used to that bright unwavering light; she could not and would not keep it turned upon herself. Its beam grew less; and once more she saw herself as she wished to see herself, not with every flaw pitilessly illumined. Sorrow and youth incarnate. She would never again be happy, she

thought, while tears of self-pity streamed down her cheeks; but peace might come with expiation.

In June she went to live with Donald's mother.

It was a hot day, with thunder in the air, when Mrs. Boynton led her up a path between two hydrangea bushes, covered with flowers like boiled dumplings, to a complacent dwelling painted yellow, with a small tower, a front porch five steps up from the ground, and lace curtains looped back in the windows to reveal pots of flourishing aspidistra. One window, on the second floor, oval in shape, was of stained glass in a pattern of conventionalized water lilies, clearly denoting to an intelligent observer that behind its firm modesty lay the bathroom.

When the screen-door had slammed behind them, Mrs. Boynton threw her arms about Marigold:

"Welcome home, little daughter!" she cried emotionally. "It's a sad home-coming for you, I know, but we must both be sure that Donald is with us every *second*. And now I want to show you your new home."

She led Marigold from room to room. She prided herself on keeping up with the times, and her scheme of decoration had faithfully followed each new fashion, from the time when Donald was a little boy; when bunches of dried pampas grass had filled the mantel-piece vases, and oil paintings, in

gilt frames so deep that looking at a picture had been like looking at a tiny landscape at the other end of a tunnel, had hung on the walls. They were hidden away now, and so were the black walnut chairs with their tufted velvet seats, the what-not carved with leaves and flowers, the stereoscope and its views of *Watkin's Glen* and the *Franconia* hills. The parlour had been redecorated in mahogany and old rose; sepia prints of *Sir Galahad* and *Whistler's Mother* hung on the walls; a tea-table, always set but seldom used, stood before the gas-log fire-place, together with a mahogany muffin-stand. The old things had been ugly, but they had had character: now the house was complacent, and empty of reality.

“And here's the dining-room—the blue curtains are pretty with the tapestry paper, aren't they, dear? Then the den—we don't use that much now—Mr. Boynton and Donald——”

She paused, pressing her handkerchief to her mouth; her face worked, her nose grew pink, her eyes swam with tears. Presently she swallowed, smiled brightly, and went on:

“Now come upstairs, to my lady's chamber! Here's your room—I've had it papered specially for you, dear, the paper's just a little message from Donald-Boy—‘Forget-Me-Not’. Here I am just opposite you. Here's Donald's room.” She wept again.

"I've kept it exactly as it was the last time he went out of it. I've never changed a thing. See, there's the magazine he was reading, open on the arm of his chair, and his pipe lying on the ash-tray. I'll tell you what I do, dear, every evening just at twilight, when Donny used to be coming home, I come and sit here for a little while and think about my boy—about *our* boy—and I feel him so near—he's with me in the gloaming. We'll sit here together often, Marigold, and talk of Donald, just very simply and tenderly, won't we?"

Marigold, rigid with embarrassment, made a faint sound of assent; and Mrs. Boynton went on with determined brightness:

"Well, now you've seen it, what do you think of your new home, lady-bird?"

"It's perfectly lovely!" said Marigold; she was afraid that Mrs. Boynton must see how dismayed she was; her voice rang with forced enthusiasm. "Such big bright rooms! And you were a darling to have that pretty wall-paper put on for me!"

Try not to think of home—of flower-filled rooms—of deep chairs covered with old sea-shell patterned chintz, cool to a hot cheek—of the Biblical tiles that a little girl had loved, yellow and blue and cream-coloured around the nursery fireplace—of the lawn where at this time of the afternoon, the shadows were long on the green-gold grass. Better not to think of those things now.

Mrs. Boynton smiled deprecatingly. "It's simple, but it *is* homey and cozy. 'Be it ever so humble', you know! Well—I hope you'll be happy here, dear."

"Oh, I *know* I shall!"

"And there's just one thing that I'm going to say now, and then we'll never speak of it again. I know that of course you must often think: 'If Donald had never met me, he'd be alive and well today.' Well, you mustn't dwell on that. You mustn't ever blame yourself for what happened, or think that that's the way I feel about it."

Marigold thought: "Don, I did kill you. Do you know how unhappy I am? Have you forgiven me, Don?"

PART II: MRS. BOYNTON'S HOUSE

PART II: *Mrs. Boynton's House*

CHAPTER VIII

POSING FOR MRS. BOYNTON

WHEN Marigold came to live with Mrs. Boynton, she had, as usual, seen herself as the heroine of the drama. Slender, black-clad, pathetic, with her life of love and youth and happiness over before it had begun, she saw herself gallantly hiding her broken heart. If Donald had died for her, she would give him back a royal gift, a measure of sacrifice and service pressed down and running over; she would fill his mother's empty life, empty through her, no matter how Don had died; would flood it with golden light.

But Marigold was not the only one who saw herself as the central figure of their tragedy. Mrs. Boynton, as the bereaved mother, felt herself at the core of the sorrow of the whole world. She had made her room a shrine to Motherhood: framed poems on the walls celebrated Mothers, and books and pictures glorified them. There she sat, and she believed she was thinking of her dead son; but more often, while tears trickled down her cheeks and her

hands writhed in her lap, she was thinking of herself. She thought of Don's life and hers as a symphony of adoration and understanding. As a matter of fact, they had gotten on amicably only because she let him have his own way in everything. Her emotional demands had exasperated him often enough, and he had learned to walk a tortuous course that avoided on the one side her tearful upbraiding and on the other the more violent demonstrations of her adoration; but, since his death, every detail in their relationship that was not as bright and beautiful as she wanted it to be had faded from the picture.

Donald had told Marigold that he had never found one creed broad enough to hold his religion, and that his Church was God's Great Out-of-Doors; his mother, less difficult to please, was a member of the Presbyterian Church; but on this stern rock blossomed flowers of less austere faiths—a little modified Christian Science, but not enough to spoil her enjoyment of her aches and pains; and bits of vague, pleasant doctrines that promised health, wealth, and happiness to their followers. She enjoyed closing her eyes, relaxing comfortably in a cushioned chair, and saying to herself: "Peace. Love. Beauty. Strength." A little book she sometimes read said that if she did this often enough, Peace, Love, Beauty, and Strength would gently unfold in her heart, like white petals unfolding to reveal the golden heart of a rose. This passage she

thought so pretty that she scored it heavily, and wrote on the margin: "Beautiful—and *true!*"

She liked the emphasis to be laid on such comfortable things, rather than on gloomy matters—death, for instance. But, although she was afraid of dying, she firmly believed in Heaven—a Heaven that she had never visualized beyond a blaze of light presided over by God the Father, looking like a serious Santa Claus, but with billowing white robes instead of fur-trimmed scarlet tunic; God the Son, in white robes, too, but robes that fell about him in gentle dejected folds; and God the Holy Ghost, a dove—just a dove. But now the one distinct important feature of Heaven to Mrs. Boynton was that Donald was there.

"I expect Donald and the dear Grandma are together all the time," she said to Marigold. She seemed to feel that Mrs. Trent had been very fortunate to have such a companion, on the longest journey.

With a little hidden spurt of laughter, Marigold imagined Mrs. Trent's indignation, in case she had had to share the same cloud with Donald while they waited for Saint Peter to unlock the Golden Gate.

One night after dinner Mrs. Boynton brought out her ouija board and asked Marigold to work it with her.

"I could never get it to make sense, all by myself,

but Son *might* speak to us, now that you're here," she said, her voice shaken with eagerness. "Oh, Marigold, if he only would! If he only would!"

Marigold felt reluctant, and yet—it would be so easy to pretend; it would hurt no one, and make Mrs. Boynton happy. The pointer, shifting aimlessly beneath their finger-tips, began to waver from letter to letter. How easy to make it spell a word—just think of a letter, and almost of itself the pointer went to it—a butterfly light touch of direction; "M", and then "O"; it spelled out "Mother". Mrs. Boynton's eyes shone like stars in her white face. "Marigold!" she breathed, "I'm not pushing, are you? Oh——!"

"Mother—hello—it's Don talking to you——"

The pointer moved lightly and quickly.

"You look so pretty to-night—but keep jolly—I'm not far off——"

"*Donny!*"

"Mother"

"*Donny!* Son! Say something to *prove* it's you!"

"Remember my rabbit named Elsie—remember when I had measles you read The Boy Travellers in Africa to me—the cookies you kept in the stone crock—your white rose bush my goat ate——"

Don had told Marigold a thousand things about his boyhood. She hardly knew herself what she would spell out with the flying pointer.

“Darling Mother—sometime soon it will be all as it used to be——”

“Oh, it goes so fast! I can’t keep track! I can’t keep track! Oh, *Donald*!”

“It just spelled ‘Mother—Mother’.”

“Oh, I’m so happy I shall die! To have my boy again! Nobody else knew those funny little things—even I hadn’t thought of them for ages. Oh, *Donny*! My own baby! When his goat ate my rose bush he wanted to buy me another with the pennies out of his little bank. Oh, *Marigold*, you can’t *help* believing that was *Donald*, can you?”

In the mother’s heart was hidden a warm thought that she was ashamed of. “He didn’t even speak to *Marigold*—it was all for me!”

Every evening after that they worked the ouija board. Sometimes the messages came at once; sometimes the pointer swooped and circled meaninglessly for a time; but at last it always spelled out “Mother”, and the messages would follow, sometimes wistful, sometimes gay, but always all for her.

One night, when Mrs. Boynton had been asking questions—“Have you seen Papa, dear?” “What do you do all the time?” “Do you see us every minute?” —she said to *Marigold*: “I’ve got to ask *Donald* about—about his accident. It just haunts me—I’ve got to ask him exactly how it happened.” She lifted her strained face, her eyes squeezed shut. “*Donald*!

Will you tell Mother what happened when you—passed over?"

Marigold felt faint and sick. Under her trembling finger-tips the pointer lurched and stopped. Her blood thundered in her ears, and through the thundering she heard Mrs. Boynton's voice repeating her question. She burst into tears, and the pointer went spinning to the floor.

"Oh, Marigold! Couldn't you have held in just a minute longer? I'm sorry it made you feel bad, but it's just as hard for *me*—and he was going to tell us about it. I felt it move—can't you stop crying and try again?"

But Marigold could not stop crying. She hid her wet face in her shaking hands and the tears trickled through her fingers like the waters from some bitter spring.

She could not sleep that night, and presently she got up and put on the frilled pink dressing-gown from her trousseau, and went softly down the hall to Donald's room. As she opened the door she felt a sudden stab of terror as something white came towards her, but it was only the curtain blowing in at the open window. Moonlight flooded the room. She moved about softly, touching the things that had been his; on his desk lay one of the books she had sent him; she thought perhaps he had been trying to read it, for her sake, and with tears stinging

into her eyes, she opened it. A sheet of paper fell from it, and, picking it up, she saw it was the beginning of a letter to herself:

“Little Marigold——

I love you so to-night, my darling. I wonder if you are thinking of me—I wonder if you miss me—do you, sweetheart? I love you—I love you——”

She slipped to the floor by his big chair, and buried her face in her arms. “Oh, Donny,” she sobbed, “wherever you are, you know all about everything now. You know how sorry I am—please, *please* forgive me. I’m trying so hard to make up for it, Don. *Don, somewhere*, you used to love me, so please forgive me for not having loved you—please forgive me! Oh, Don—Don——”

The tears poured over her face, and stained the rosy bridal glories of her dressing-gown; she was tense and trembling. If for just one moment he could be sitting there, in his old place, to wipe the tears from her swollen face as he had done once before, to tell her that he understood, and that it was all right.

She screamed with terror, as she heard something moving softly behind her. But it was only Mrs. Boynton.

“Whatever are you doing at this hour of the night?” she said. “For mercy’s sake, get back to

bed. I don't know what's gotten into you, Marigold. You can't *possibly* know what it is to miss Donald as I miss him, every second of the day and night, but *I* don't go round at dead of night screaming and crying."

The two women had nothing in common except the memory of the dead man; thrown together in an unnatural intimacy day after monotonous day, it was little wonder that at times they wore on each other almost unbearably. If Marigold did not seem to be missing Don enough, Mrs. Boynton would melt into tears because her boy was so soon forgotten; if she showed signs of grieving, his mother would harden with resentful jealousy. She thought Marigold was affected; she would sometimes say, with real irritation behind the playfulness of her voice: "Mercy, Marigold, you use such a broad A you sound as if you had hot potato in your mouth! Makes me think of something Donald used to say about a Cahlf who went down a paht in a minute and a hahlf to take a bahth." She thought Marigold was extravagant: "I just happened to find this sales-slip in the waste-paper basket, and I looked at it because I thought it was something of mine. *Two dollars* for violet sachet! Well—none but the wealthy are happy!"

Marigold, too, had her moments of frantic irritation. There was no such thing as privacy for any-

one who lived with Mrs. Boynton, no secret of body or soul safe from the probing of what she honestly believed was not curiosity, but affectionate interest. She hated solitude; the doors of the bed-rooms had warped and would not lock, and Marigold had grown to wait with a sick dread for the slow widening of the crack, and the voice that said: "Now, if I'm in the way——!" Even in the tub she was not secure. That door did lock, but she seldom began to run the water without Mrs. Boynton's voice sounding on the other side:

"Marigold! Marigold! You aren't taking *another* bath, are you? Mercy, you'll wash yourself away! No, go on now you've started, but just be a little careful of the hot water—I say be careful of the hot water, there isn't much."

She told herself that Mrs. Boynton was kind: that except for her she would be homeless: that she had become over-sensitive and morbid because they were too much together. There were times when Marigold could have rushed screaming from the house. Yet just as she would feel that the situation was hopeless, some real little flame of gentleness and kindness would spring up between the two women, throwing for a moment a pure and lovely light on their life together. A new note would sound in their voices, they would look at one another kindly, with unguarded eyes. For in spite of their self-centeredness, they had each received the accolade

of pain, which must always give something of nobility.

Marigold thought that life would not be so difficult if she had friends—a friend. But she had made none. The girls who had known Donald called on her, looking her over curiously. She thought of the talk in the dressing-room at the dance, on the night Don had called her out into the scented moonlight; of the girl who had told Pinky about Don's kisses. How well had they known him, she wondered? She was reserved, icily gentle and polite with them, drawing into herself. With the women of Mrs. Boynton's age she got on better; they said she was a sweet little thing, and mistook her reserve for shyness. If they had known the condescension she felt towards them, they would have been outraged. But so far she had met no one who really interested her. When Mrs. Boynton told her that Judge and Mrs. Prout wanted to give a dinner in her honour—a big dinner, ten people—she thought: "Out of ten people there might be *someone*." "But we are in mourning," she added aloud.

Mrs. Boynton had been crying most of the night before, and her little face was a mottled lilac, but she answered bravely: "Not mourning, dear, *rejoicing* that it is well with our boy. We must always be careful to hold the Life-Thought and the Love-

Thought about him. And about Grandma, too, of course," she added politely.

So now they were entering the Prout drawing-room.

Mrs. Prout, fat, calm, with big cow-like eyes, her bulging body squeezed into a baby-blue satin dress, led Marigold around the solemn circle. There was Dorothy Douty, a young married woman with bright cheeks and hard eyes; through a hundred little hints Marigold had learned that she and Donald had once been considered engaged. There was Mrs. Barton, a self-satisfied bride with carefully careless blonde curls who (Marigold uncharitably told herself) thought that she resembled a wind-blown daffodil. As Marigold rather went in for looking like a daffodil herself, she found the bride annoying. There were husbands to go with these ladies: there was Judge Prout: there were two unattached men, rather dim. Although the affair had been spoken of by Mrs. Prout as "thoroughly informal, really just dropping into supper," the ladies wore ball-gowns, with chiffon scarfs draped modestly about their bare shoulders; the gentlemen presented a dazzling appearance in swallow-tail coats and white ties. Marigold felt simple, pathetic, and well-bred in her black gown, and she liked the look of her arm, very white and slender, as Judge Prout facetiously drew it through his, and led the way into dinner with a sort of modified cake-walk.

All the dining-room lamps were blazing in their ground glass globes, dimming the light of the candles of dark blue wax. In the center of the table was a shallow pottery bowl, holding a glass block in which were stuck carnations and sprays of asparagus fern, while around the bowl's edge perched china birds, their perching made secure by rather too visible lumps of wax. It was evidently going to be something rather grand in the way of a dinner, for, beside the "Colonial Lady" dinner cards, large warmish oysters swooned at every place.

Marigold, who had begun talking to her host in a lively fashion, suddenly realized that the others were silent, their eyes fixed on her reprovingly. She faltered, and stopped talking. Her hostess said: "Now, Judge Prout, if you will ask the blessing."

It was indeed a very grand dinner. After the oysters came soup with whipped cream; then a leg of lamb, two kinds of potatoes, and string beans fully justifying their name; party extras of jelly and celery, of salted peanuts, olives, and pickles; a salad rising like a Vesuvius—first a round of tinned pineapple, then sliced bananas and chopped walnuts, then a marshmallow, then a maraschino cherry—with a lava of mayonnaise flowing down its sides; ice-cream with more whipped cream and chopped nuts and cherries; lady-fingers; assorted chocolates in paper collars. To drink, there was iced water in heavy cut-glass tumblers.

"Well, well, it's pleasant to have all you good people with us to-night!" Judge Prout said buoyantly. "You'll have to watch out between those two fair ladies, Barton, that you don't forget you're a married man now!"

"Oh, I have my eye on him," said his bride coquettishly. Her husband announced that already he knew what it was to dread domestic discipline. There was polite laughter, through which Mrs. Prout was heard to murmur: "Pass the jelly now, Martha." Conversation became general.

"Well, how do you like our town, Miss Trent?"

"But Tagore's works carry such a *message*—"
(This was the bride.)

"Our own currants. I put up forty—"

"—not the comedies, no. What *is* there funny about seeing Charlie Chaplin throw a custard pie? And the serious ones are so far-fetched; but I *love* the Current Events and the Travel Pictures—"

"Pass the potatoes to the Judge, Martha—no, not the Irish, the candied sweets."

"—said, 'I guess I'll say my prayers to Santa after this.' We thought it was pretty cute, she's only—"

"—my receipt calls for pound for pound, but I always—"

"—they ought to shoot 'em down like dogs; that's the only sort of argument those Sinn Feiners understand."

“—McCormack—” “—pickled peaches—”—as Stevenson says—” “—Douglas Fairbanks—“ “—Democratic—”

A sudden silence fell: plates were changed; and in the hush some sort of mild panic was heard going on in the pantry. Marigold began to talk to her right hand neighbour, but he said reprovingly, “I think the Judge is going to tell us one of his stories.”

A pyramid of fruit was passed, and was looked at dejectedly by every one except one of the dim young men, who recklessly attempted to take two or three grapes, and sent the whole erection toppling. Oranges rolled across the table and went thudding to the floor; Mrs. Prout said patiently it was of no consequence. The ladies, archly begging the gentlemen not to be too long in rejoining them, went into the drawing-room.

“Would any of you ladies like a cigarette?” Mrs. Prout asked.

Hearty laughter from her guests indicated that this was a *jeu d'esprit*, and Judge Prout's fine saying about ladies and tobacco was quoted: “Someone asked the Judge what he thought about ladies smoking, and he answered quick as a flash, ‘It's a thing that can never happen—if she smokes, then she isn't a lady.’”

“Have you had typhoid?” Mrs. Prout asked Marigold, gazing at her with big expressionless eyes. “No.”

"Oh—I thought maybe that was why your hair was cut."

She seemed to hear Don's voice: "Of course I'm crazy over every little thing about you, Sweetheart, but I'm afraid the folks back home may not quite get that bobbed hair of yours. They don't have much use for short-haired women and long-haired men, and I don't know but what they've got something on their side, at that."

The ladies, with the exception of Marigold and the Wind-Blown Daffodil, had brought their work. "Have you finished that *exquisite* slumber-robe, Mrs. Prout? I was just telling Marigold about it. The most exquisite shades of old rose and grey, Marigold, I do think that's such an artistic combination."

"Yes, now I'm doing this sweater for Thyrza, Will's daughter, you know. She goes to Smith in the fall. Pardon? Yes, it *does* seem so, being the only daughter, but her father just idolizes her, so if Miss Thyrza wants to go, she *goes*—and when I ordered the wool from the Beehive I distinctly said *canary*, but seems to me it's more on the mustard—"

The talk veered to Mrs. Douty's baby, a recent acquisition, and whether or not she had had a "hard time" was discussed with gusto. The bride was told that she must not let this discourage her, and instantly put on a rather pinched expression. Mrs.

Douty had been attended by Dr. Bellamy, and considered him unsympathetic: she said briskly: "Why, from the very first minute I became pregnant——"

Details followed. Marigold looked at her with cold dislike, so hard and bright and cock-sure. She hated this girl, who, like herself, had felt Don's arms about her, had known Don's kisses; and she knew that Dorothy Douty hated her.

The entrance of the gentlemen put an end to the obstetrical details; and the Wind-Blown Daffodil revived, and launched into an anecdote in which her curls figured prominently. Judge Prout trotted Marigold on a mental knee: she felt that she was not making much of an impression, that instead of realizing that she was a lovely, tragic figure (as indeed she was) they only thought she was less smartly dressed than they. Yielding to snobbishness, she dragged her godmother, Granny's old friend Countess de Rodellec, into the conversation by main force, without visible effect on her companions. Presently Mrs. Boynton said, "Well, Marigold——," and it was time to tell Mrs. Prout how much they had enjoyed the evening.

There had been no one there who could help her: soon she would learn that there never would be any one: she would learn to give up the faint hope of escape. Donald in setting her free had made her a prisoner forever.

She could not go away, because if she left Mrs.

Boynton she had not the least idea of where to go or what to do. Here she was—here she must stay. She who had pretended for so long must go on pretending now: she had once pretended to him that she loved him; now she must pretend to be what every one believed her; sweet; gentle; devoted to the mother of the man who had loved her; and heart-broken for him.

CHAPTER IX

COLLAPSE

MRS. BOYNTON and Marigold got up at seven o'clock every morning; not because there was anything in particular to get up for, but because Mrs. Boynton always had. At breakfast Marigold waited apprehensively to learn Mrs. Boynton's mood for the day: sometimes she was cheerful and affectionate, full of conversation and brisk plans: on other mornings she was gloomy and morose, her eyes not meeting Marigold's. When she spoke, her almost inaudible voice would come from between stiff, barely moving lips, opened as little as possible. On these days she would sit in her room holding some toy that had been Donald's when he was a child, or a packet of his letters, gazing straight before her with eyes that sometimes burned feverishly and sometimes ran over with tears. Her body would be tense and rigid; the whole house would be electric until the breaking of the inevitable storm of lamentation for her dead son.

If she was feeling cheerful, a frenzy of house-keeping took place after breakfast. She would shout orders over the telephone; shout to the kitchen to

ask if it was sago or tapioca the cook had wanted; shout to the "second girl" to say that she could not hear the grocer at the other end of the wire because of the vacuum cleaner, which roared through the house at all hours of the day. She would have long intimate conversations with the cook of the moment as she ordered the meals. "Mr. Boynton really used to worship me," she would say: "You said two loaves of bread, didn't you, Annie? He could hardly bear me out of his sight, not much like the way things are to-day, with all the divorces you hear about, and when I was sick he used to act like a wild man; when I was in the hospital for my operation he lost fifteen pounds just through worrying. I think greening apples would be all right for coddling, don't you? Or maybe it would be better to use up the canned blackberries and have a flummery—what do you think?" She enjoyed herself thoroughly.

There was nothing for Marigold to do; she did not want her help. "It isn't as if there would be any use of your learning how to keep house, dear," she said: "Of course if Donald had lived it would have been my greatest happiness to teach his little wife everything I could, but now it doesn't seem worth bothering your head about it, since you won't ever have to run a house of your own." Marigold seemed to hear again, as she had heard so often, the clash of the prison gates.

After the empty morning came luncheon; and the afternoon, empty, too, of any reality. Sometimes friends of Mrs. Boynton's came to gossip or play bridge; sometimes Mrs. Boynton and Marigold paid a call. Marigold tried to pretend to herself that reading and walking were enough to make contentment: but she was so tired and listless all the time now that she walked less and less: and books had lost much of their old magic. Her brain felt hot and heavy, and it was hard to concentrate on anything.

At the time that at home had been tea-time, and the pleasantest hour of the day, Marigold's worst homesickness always came over her, drowning her heart in its bitter flood. She ached then for Granny sitting by the fire, or in her basket chair under the big cedar on the lawn; she ached for cross little Coco, living now with the Hoppers; she could see his wet pink tongue lolling out of his mouth as his anxious eyes followed each morsel of bread and butter; she ached for the close-shaven lawn; the foxgloves turning to spires of seeds; the bees loud in the lavender bushes; or, as the year turned from gold to silver, for firelight leaping on familiar walls. Home, her sick heart cried, home, with its shining serenity and secret beauty!

After dinner she read aloud from books of Mrs. Boynton's choice, books in which strong silent heroes with crooked smiles provided plenty of incident;

or in which penniless little Irish girls with a laugh in the heart o' them and a tear in the eye o' them won the adoration of everybody. Then, at ten o'clock every night, Mrs. Boynton, patting back a yawn, would glance at the clock and be astonished at the hour. "Mercy, I had no idea it was so late!" she would exclaim: "Where's the evening gone to? Well—all aboard for Dream-Land!"

Day after day, day after day.

They were all the same, except that at first they had held the sound of whirring lawn-mowers, and Marigold had picked rose-bugs from the rose-bushes into cocoa-tins of kerosene: then came the smell of burning leaves, and she had helped in getting out blankets done up in newspapers and camphor: now the days were cold, and coal-carts creaked over the snow: but they were the same days, each one like the last, and each heavy with memories of Donald. Through the day his mother would talk of him: more than once she cried with sudden violence: "You mustn't ever forget Donald, Marigold! You mustn't ever stop loving him—ever! Ever!" Or she said, with trembling lips and tear-filled eyes: "What would we do without each other, now that we haven't Donny? I should just die of loneliness. We must always cling together, mustn't we, Marigold?" And Marigold would think again the old torturing thought: "If he'd never known me, Don

would be here with her now. It's my fault that Don is dead."

She was more nearly exhausted by the last two years than any one realized. The strain of her engagement; the demands of Don's passion that she so soon had had to meet with pretense; the shock of his death, and of her grandmother's; and the terror of the future, had left her mind and body quiveringly sensitive. She was not strong enough to bear the recurrent thought that beat in her brain: "Don is dead because of me."

She walked through her days in a dreaming fever, indifferent to all the things that once had made her happiness. What had happened to her, who had held the world in her heart? Once her life had glowed and trembled with colour and beauty. From her travels with her father when she was a child, and from her books, she kept a thousand vivid pictures, clear and bright and touching as the little landscapes seen through the peep-holes in Easter-eggs: mimosa-trees, fountains of powdery gold, flung like spray against the swooning blue of a Southern sky: sea-gulls crying and calling in the mist, and the grey sea rushing past: wild hyacinths in an English wood, staining the whole earth blue: a procession in a Spanish village on Corpus Christi Day, little altar boys in lace and scarlet carrying candles taller than themselves, and the two gigantic figures of Jesus and Mary, as high as the house-

tops, mincing along with the steps of the men who bore them forward, hidden under their skirts that were hung with ribbons and jewels and lace. But now she only saw walls—walls that shut her in with a dead man, dead because of her, and a dead man's mother.

Where had the shining inner life gone, the clairvoyant moments when she had caught her fleeting gleams of Heaven? Once she had known what it was to be so happy that her heart was like a clear wave that lifts itself, translucent green and gold, against the sun. Where was her secret happiness now?

She could not sleep, and the nights had grown terrible to her. She remembered with wonder the time when she had thought that not to sleep well was something rather fine and delicate; when it had been one of her little poses. Now she longed for sleep as a man dying from thirst longs for water. She would lie in the darkness, every nerve tense, her neck aching, her back aching, little hot needle-points pricking her skin, while the bed grew hard and the sheets hot and crumpled. She would lie dreading the widening of the streak of faint light that told her her door was being pushed open; dreading the whispering voice that would say: "Marigold! Are you awake? I got to thinking about Donny, and I couldn't go to sleep—let's talk about our boy a little."

Worse than the sleepless nights were the nights of dreams. Night after night she would see Don, always in some peril that only she could save him from. Dark water, glistening like oil, would close over his face, and her hand would not go out to him; or with a great black rushing a giant pine-tree would fall on him, at first slanting over so slowly that she could have saved him, but she could neither move nor make a sound. Sometimes she saw him walking with groping hands, blind, but she could not reach his side to guide him before he crashed sickeningly against some stony corner. Sometimes she saw crouching behind him beastly figures, lunatics, or dwarfs, creeping up on him, but she could not warn him. Worst of all were the dreams in which everything was nebulous, a mist of sick pain and despair, through which his voice called her name in agony.

She would wake with a start, trembling, and burning with fever; or she would lie for hours shaking with sobs, crushing her hands against her mouth so that Mrs. Boynton should not hear her. She would cry until she was sick and dizzy, and then lie exhausted until the windows grew grey with the coming of another heavy day.

Sometimes when she could not lie still she would roam about the house, moving through the darkness with outspread fumbling hands. Gathered into herself as she felt her way with cautious steps,

or huddled beside an open window to drink the cold air feverishly, she felt as if she had become an old woman, bent over and afraid, moving with dragging steps towards the darkness of death. Body and soul, she felt like a dead leaf, that no rain nor sun can ever make tender and vivid again.

On Sunday afternoons she and Mrs. Boynton visited Don's grave, carrying the dozen white roses for which Mr. McGrath the florist had a standing order. Frank, the coloured man who cut the grass, took care of the furnace, and ran the motor-car, liked to spend Sunday quietly with his family; so Marigold and Mrs. Boynton made the long trip in the crowded street-cars, and came home tired and depressed. They had been to the cemetery one January afternoon, and were standing on the front porch shaking the snow from their muffs, and stamping their cold wet feet, when Dorothy Douty's mother, Mrs. Marshall, came up the path.

"Well, Eva Boynton, I got to thinking I never *would* see you again! Seems like ages, doesn't it? I told Mr. Marshall, 'I haven't seen Eva for so long, I'm just going to slip around this afternoon, I'm *sure* to catch her with a snow-storm like this!' But I see even the snow hasn't kept you from gallivanting!"

"We've just been to the cemetery," said Mrs. Boynton, in a voice calculated to quench her friend's

playfulness. Mrs. Marshall hastily adopted a more reverent tone.

“Eva, you’re wonderful! You never let *anything* interfere with going to Donald’s grave, do you? I wish I could tell you all the people I’ve heard say you were just their *ideal* of a Mother.” She gave listless Marigold a brisk squeeze. “I guess here’s *one* little girl who feels that way!”

Marigold made a polite sound. They let themselves in, for the maids, as well as Frank, preferred not to work on Sundays: the house seemed hot and stuffy after the snow-filled air, and Sunday papers were strewn about the parlour.

“Well!” said Mrs. Marshall, settling herself in an armchair: “This is what I call comfy! I love to be all cozy and snug when it’s storming outside, don’t you? Well, girls, I have a piece of news for you, but you must promise not to breathe a word to a single soul. When Dorothy told me, she said, ‘I’d like Mrs. Boynton to know’—she certainly has a warm spot in her heart for you, Eva—and I know she wouldn’t mind Marigold knowing, too. She’s expecting again!”

Mrs. Boynton’s eyes filled with tears, as they usually did at any mention of babies, no matter how indirect; and she sighed heart-brokenly.

“At first when Dorothy told me, I thought it was too soon—Junior’s only a year old now, you know—but it won’t be till July—”

"And it will be lovely for Junior to have a little brother or sister so nearly his age," Mrs. Boynton sighed.

"Yes, that's what I tell Dorothy. I say while you're having them, you might as well have them all together, and get through with it. I knew you'd be interested on account of——." She broke off suddenly, affecting a cough, and glancing at Marigold.

"Wouldn't you like me to get you some tea, Mrs. Boynton?" Marigold asked.

"Why, I hardly believe we care for any, dear—or *would* you like some, Carrie?"

"To tell you the truth, I *would*, Eva."

"I let the girls go out on Sunday, it seems to mean so much to them, so we don't put on much style, but if you don't mind *that*——"

Mrs. Marshall said facetiously: "Mercy yes! I *insist* on style! Well, as I was saying, Dorothy——"

"Marigold! Excuse me, Carrie. Marigold, if you make toast, use the loaf in the soup-tureen, the one in the bread-can is fresh bread. In the big covered soup-tureen on the kitchen dresser. I beg your pardon, you were saying Dorothy——?"

Marigold moved about the kitchen, putting the kettle on to boil, and cutting the bread for toast. She had a strange feeling of floating, nothing seemed real or solid: her head seemed to float up from her body, growing huge and light like a great

balloon. Going into the dining-room for cups and saucers, she heard the women's voices.

"Of course Walter's a dear, and we're devoted to him, but to tell you the truth, Eva, I don't think Dorothy's ever cared for *anybody* quite the way she cared for Donald."

"Carrie, I can't bear it! To think that this might be Donny's baby that's coming! Because I *know* he and Dorothy would have made it up again if only he hadn't met Marigold. Oh, I try not to complain, but I can't help thinking all the time that if Donald had never seen her he'd be alive and well to-day!"

Marigold thought: "I don't care: I'm too tired to care." She went to the window and pressed her hot forehead to the cold glass. She looked at the air full of whirling snow-flakes. Babies. Fat little bodies, creased little ankles and wrists, heads as downy as ducklings. The air seemed full of them, tumbling and whirling, a storm of babies instead of a storm of snow. The babies she must never have.

She heard the women's voices, faint but clear, like voices in a dream:

"It hurts to think I'll never hold Donald's babies in my arms."

"And you are so wonderful with children, too!"

"The kiddies and I understand each other. You can't fool the little folks, you know; they know who

loves them. Sometimes I try to talk, so lovingly and tenderly, to Marigold of what Donald's kiddies would have been like——”

Marigold heard her own voice say: “I can't stand it!” She tried to stop the voice that screamed: “I can't stand it!” but it was not her voice any longer —it had gone beyond any control of hers. She saw Mrs. Boynton coming towards her, and Mrs. Marshall.

It was not only the people who hurried to her that she shrank from, crying “Don't touch me!” It was life that pressed against her too closely.

“Don't touch me! Don't touch me!”

Marigold fell screaming to the floor, as waves roared in her ears, and black waves broke over her head. Sinking through darkness and stars, she could hear a voice screaming: “Don't touch me! Don't touch me!”

Sucked down by a thundering whirlpool, she sank to silence.

CHAPTER X

GEORGE

HILDA BELLAMY was the only child of a rich man, who would have nothing to do with her after she married a poor country doctor: William Fairchild had intended more magnificent things for his daughter; a title, at least. Hilda shed a few tears, but she was too happy to care very much: her life was filled by her husband, and by the little child of their passionate love.

Her father went from spa to spa, held the fluffy parasols of grand duchesses along the Riviera, or skated at St. Moritz. Hilda sometimes saw photographs in the illustrated weeklies—"The names, reading from left to right, are Baron de Thurn, Lady Ursula Hamilton, the Hon. Ivy Kepp-Russell, Mr. W. Fairchild——"

"There is your dear Grandpapa," his daughter would say, pointing him out to her little son George.

After George Bellamy was grown to be a man, he drew his memories from the enchanted bran-pie of childhood. He remembered the time when he was so small that daisies waved above his head, and a droning bee almost blotted out the sky: he re-

membered his donkey, on which he sat proudly, his fat legs sticking straight out on either side: his rabbits, their twitching noses close together, telling each other the secrets that a little boy could never know.

The garden covered half the world then, and he and his mother had played together there, being Indians under the sweeping branches of the pine-trees, or having wild games with the brightly-banded croquet balls; or they had worked together in the borders, setting out seedlings in the wet earth, until his mother would cry: "Oh, little George, you are the dirtiest little boy in the whole world! Your face is so dirty that if I planted seeds on it they would grow! I'm going to plant one right on the end of your nose!" When they went in his nurse would roll out the big green tub, that made such a rumbling as it came down the hall, and he would splash in the warm soapy water until his bath toys rocked on the waves.

Then his mother died; and he and his father lived alone in the big old house. Weeds grew in the garden; and ashes were grey where fires had blazed before; but gentleness and courtesy remained. George had adored his mother; his father he loved with a protective tenderness strange to find in a little boy. Dr. Bellamy taught his son, and talked to him: George hardly felt the need of other friends. He was a shy, sensitive child. In his

father's library, that long dark room where the empty marble fireplace, the lusters dripping from the unlit lamps, the glass doors of the tall book-cases, glimmered like things seen dimly under water, he pored over books until the world seemed to revolve before him, covered with bright and terrible beauties. He began collections; and frowsy nests, pasteboard boxes full of cocoons, and jars of thick greenish liquid containing dead tadpoles, were to be found in unexpected places about the house. He brought home sick kittens, lame dogs, and young birds that had fallen from their nests: he took care of them, fed them in spite of the cook's protests, named them and loved them.

He invented a playmate named Bill, and had long games with him that continued for weeks, under the pine-tree boughs, or in the woods beside the brook which ran between banks where clustered ferns thrust up curled furry heads. He wrote and drew in an old copy-book, that he kept hidden away: it was called "Bill's Book", and there were pictures of Bill, Bill's house, Bill's horse, Bill's ship, in which his secret friend went to all the strange lands that coloured George's thoughts.

Sometimes another boy played with him in the woods, when the Bellamys' neighbors, the Currys, came from Paris for a short stay in their American home—the big country house, so hideous and grand with its port-cochère and cupola, its ribbon borders

planted with rippling stripes of blue lobelias, yellow calceolarias, and red geraniums, and its hot-houses, where great bunches of white and purple grapes hung heavy.

Hugo Curry was five years younger than George, a delicate and lonely little boy, already rather bored with life. George would make willow whistles for him, and show him how to find the queer creatures that live in brooks, and he grew rather fond of the sallow, black-haired child, with his queer French clothes—tight suits of blue jersey, and black slippers and white socks. But he was really happiest when he was by himself. Even as a child the great and little gifts of beauty were his; and the pain of beauty was in his eager heart.

Seeking and pursued by eternal truth, he walked through life; longing to touch all men, and always alone.

George was to follow his father, and be a doctor; they planned to work together in the little hospital that Dr. Bellamy had started. But during his first year at college his father died. A few months later his grandfather, Mr. Fairchild, died in Rome, leaving his money to George, because there was no one else to leave it to except a clinging nephew that he rather despised; and because he really had loved his daughter, in a selfish way, and had missed her.

George finished college—a time of visions, of night-long conversations in front of the fire, ending with long walks in the cold dawn; of experiments in friends, in thought, in modes of life. He and his friends moved with their heads knocking against the stars: they got drunk, and roared gloriously together; or they talked of the sorrow and emptiness of life while they ate enormous quantities of toasted muffins. Then he went to Germany, to finish his medical studies; and after that, before he came home, he traveled in strange countries, always hunting for the secret beauty and wonder of life that beckoned from temple windows, that flashed in the flight of bright flamingoes, or in the sunlight falling on naked brown bodies under interlacing tree-ferns—beckoned, and disappeared.

But wherever he went, a slender thread bound him, and at last drew him back, to the old grey house among the pine trees.

The house, like all houses that have been dearly loved, had personality and atmosphere. Its rooms were delicately haunted by ghosts of love and laughter and tears. The oldest part of the house was stiff and straight, with great high-ceilinged rooms, but on each side were additions full of quaint turns and twists, little unexpected rooms all up and down small flights of steps. An enchanting house for children to play hide-and-seek in, on rainy days. Around three sides of it, and its lawns and neglected

flower-beds, the pine trees stood, their branches sweeping the lawn, that now was almost covered with vivid velvet moss. At the foot of the garden an old grape-arbour led to the orchard, where twisted apple-trees stood in fine bright grass; beyond this, through a meadow, lay the wood; beyond the wood, a clearing at the top of the high cliffs that dropped to the river.

Goerge Bellamy came back to his father's house, and took up his father's work in the hospital, and with the people who lived in the little town, and in the country surrounding it. There had never for a moment been a question in his mind as to how the money left him by his grandfather must be used. He poured it into the hospital, keeping little for himself.

He lived alone except for fluctuating flotsam and jetsam of servants. He knew some of the men in the town well; he golfed and rode with them; and they considered themselves his intimate friends; but he kept his visions to himself.

Outwardly perfectly self-confident, he hid his shyness and eagerness behind a reserve that gave him the reputation of being unsympathetic. Ladies disliked him because he told them the truth, and he had no vestige of "bed-side manner"; however, they sent for him when they were sick, for he was becoming well-known: his book on nervous diseases was quoted as an authority. As for him, he was

indifferent to what they thought of him: tolerant of people in the mass, he was apt to be intolerant of them as individuals, except when they were really ill.

On the January day when Marigold Trent fell screaming to the floor, Mrs. Boynton sent for Dr. Bellamy, and he took Marigold to his hospital.

The snow fell softly and steadily, covering Marigold as she lay in her bed. It drifted up to her chin, it made snow-covered mountain-peaks of her lifted knees. But it could not cover her face, because her head was so hot that it melted the snow. The white flakes floated down softly—not snow-flakes after all, petals from branches of apple-blossom, silvery in the moonlight. But there were snakes that slid along those branches, and fell down onto the bed—gleaming and grey, they fell on her, twisting and slipping over her body, trying to reach her face.

The little motor-car tore along over the coverlet—over the snowy mountains. Don was driving it, afraid he would be late for his wedding. She watched him, tiny as a toy, and when he reached the edge of the bed, she knew she must push him into the black pit below. No matter how desperately she struggled against it, her hand went out, pushing the tiny car over the edge.

People whispered and laughed about her bed, and, when they whispered, the gleaming grey snakes slipped out of their mouths and fell writhing on her body. They said: "She doesn't know she's dead —she thinks she's in bed, but she's buried beside Don—she thinks this white is a spread over her, she doesn't know it's the daisies in bloom, springing out of her body——" She could not tell whether she was hearing the whispering of the people or the hissing of the snakes.

Babies crawled over the bed, solemn and fat and pink. But they melted like snow-flakes at the touch of her hot hands.

Snow, falling and drifting, covering the mounds of the graves.

Sometimes when the little motor-car came tearing around a fold in the bedclothes, and Marigold felt her hands going out, cautiously, to push it over the edge of the bed, other hands took hers, and held them: strong hands that would not let her do the thing that made her soul sick. The hands would not let her kill Don against her will: they held her, and strength and peace entered her from them.

While the hands held her wrists that felt as weak as if they were made of mist, the whispering people about her bed drew back into the shadows: the dwarf without a nose, who crouched at the foot

of the bed, watching her, vanished too. Peace came about her, like the welling-up of cool water. The things were only hiding: when the strong hands were no longer there, they came again. But they were afraid of the hands.

Sometimes through the fog of fever she saw a man, and knew he was a doctor: she saw women, and realized that they were nurses: she saw the door, the windows, a crack that ran across the ceiling like a river on a map. Questions that she was too tired to ask formed in her mind, and important messages that she must deliver remained agonizingly just around the corner of consciousness. Then the fog would close in again; the tangible shapes would grow dim and disappear; the grey people would come back; or her spirit would float high in the air, looking down through falling snow at her body lying drowned in a grey sea, stirring a little with the slow waves.

But one day she opened her eyes and saw a still white room. The windows were open, and bars of sunlight fell between the chinks of the bowed shutters. Everything was clean and bare and still. She saw a woman sitting by the window, looking out and yawning. On a table by her bed were violets in a loose cluster, fresh and cool. The little blue flowers, lifted on strong and delicate stems, stabbed her heart with their beauty. It was as though she looked through crystal air at some divine

miracle: tears rose in her eyes, and ran down on to her pillow. She lay still, weak and happy, until she fell asleep.

When she awoke again, the woman was looking down at her. There was something wet and cold on her head. The windows were wide open now, and she could see little new leaves on the branches outside. She whispered:

“The snow?”

“Why, the snow’s all gone, dear. It’s spring now.”

This was too difficult to bother about. She lay, looking at the black specks that circled and crawled on the ceiling, until a man came in and sat down by her bed. He was tall and quiet, with clear blue eyes, and at first she thought she had never seen him before: but presently he took her hands in his, and then she knew that he was her friend, her strength and her comfort, whose hands had pulled her up out of the drowning sea, and had kept her from doing terrible things against her will. He would make everything clear to her. She said weakly: “Those black spots—crawling?”

“They’ll go away soon,” he said. “You see them because you are weak. You’ve been ill, but now you are going to get well.”

“The other things—will they come back?”

“They won’t come back again: they’ve gone for good.”

“Mrs. Boynton——?”

“You can see her when you get strong, not yet. She sends her love to you.”

“Where am I?”

“This is the hospital. Now you’re to go to sleep.”

But Marigold, turning her head, had seen the violets again: and again the tears streamed from her eyes. She whispered apologetically, managing a watery smile: “Silly——!” Then, as if it explained everything: “The violets——”

George Bellamy’s rather heavy face lit up beautifully: he had brought that bunch, and other bunches, hoping that she might notice them: he wished that she could see them as they grew under his hemlock hedge. Marigold knew he understood why she was crying; that he understood that the delicate dewy flowers expressed for her inexpressible things.

The long hospital days flowed past while strength came back to Marigold slowly. She had never realized how wonderful life was before: she saw everything with the crystal-clear vision that severe illness gives: the vision, like a revelation, that comes with separation from the purely physical part of being. She lay and thought, and everything she thought about seemed as simple as a drop of water, and as deep as the ocean. Clouds drifting past her window—broth—mouse-like Miss Quackenbush, the day-nurse, whose name had been so heart-breaking to remember at first—Miss Patterson, the night-

nurse, with her red hair and her pink cheeks and her stories of patients who had fallen in love with her—cracked ice—cologne—God—dying—her hands that were now so white and thin—Dr. Bellamy.

He was the strength that held her days together. They talked very little; he would feel her pulse, ask a few questions, and go on: but he always left her feeling refreshed and peaceful. She could not understand why his coming put the nurses into an apprehensive fever of preparation. Miss Quackenbush would dart about the room twitching the already even blinds, and smoothing a wrinkle in Marigold's covers: ("Oh, Miss Trent, dearie, couldn't you just lie still till Dr. Bellamy comes? The bed looks so awful when you move around, and he'll be here any minute now; I heard the whistle quarter of an hour ago!") She would be trembling until Dr. Bellamy had gone on his royal way, attended by head nurse and ward nurse and interne, carrying panic to other hearts fluttering with agitation under their starched blue and white stripes.

"Why do you worry so about him?" Marigold asked Miss Quackenbush.

"Oh, he's so *particular*, Miss Trent, he nearly kills you if everything isn't just so. He talked to Miss Clark yesterday so that she cried for half an hour in the linen closet. When you don't do things the right way he sort of looks clear through you, and

then says something in that cold reserved sarcastic way he has—you just want to sink through the floor. He's a wonderful doctor, but my, he scares me nearly to death!"

Miss Patterson agreed with Miss Quackenbush.

"I never heard him say anything sarcastic," said Marigold.

"Oh, you! I guess you haven't! You're regular Teacher's Pet with Dr. Bellamy, Miss Trent."

"I?"

"Yes, ma'am, *you*! Why, the way he treats you, any one would think you were almost as good as a child or an old man. He isn't a woman hater—mercy no, he wouldn't pay us the compliment of wasting that much good feeling on us: he just naturally doesn't know we exist. It nearly kills me to see some of the private patients fix up for him—pink silk bed-jackets, and lace caps with rosebuds, and their faces just *sot* with sweetness—and then, as I say, beyond so many sets of lungs and livers and so on, he never even knows that they exist. But he knows *you* exist, all right."

"How perfectly absurd," protested Marigold, much pleased.

"When you were sickest there were nights he'd never go home at all, just sit here holding your hands by the hour because it quieted you. He's wonderful with patients, you've got to give the Devil his due, I suppose, and I'll say for Dr. Bel-

lamy he may work you hard, but he works himself a lot harder—but I never saw him work over a patient the way he did over you, Miss Trent. Then of course he's always bringing you flowers and ferns and stuff—still, that's not unusual, he often does that to the patients, particularly the mental cases; he has some theory about it. But I never saw him let himself go with a patient before, the way he does with you, generally he shuts up like a clam, except, as I say, with the children and the old men—they're crazy about him. But women—*goodness!*"

"Isn't he married?" asked Marigold, mildly hoping, on general principles, that he was not.

"Miss Trent! Do you want to make me die laughing? I'd be sorry for his wife if he was!"

Marigold, who was beginning to be herself again, indulged in pleasant fancies after this conversation. Had she, lying fragile and white, opened with her very weakness the heart that no strength could open? This engaging idea remained with her until Dr. Bellamy's next visit; when it melted like mist in the morning before his business-like words and the placid light in his blue eyes behind their horn-rimmed spectacles. Certainly no secret fires blazed there. Also, it was difficult to think of herself as a frail white flower while she was engaged in the business of putting out her tongue. It was a relief to go back to her old feeling about him: trusting

his strength and wisdom, feeling sure of his quiet understanding, and not having to take care to show herself to him in the most favorable light. He was the one person in the world she need not pretend to: she could show herself as uninteresting and as uninterested as she pleased. She need no more pose for him than she need pose for the tree that shaded her or the spring that gave her a drink.

But she posed for the nurses. As she grew stronger from day to day, she perfected herself in her new rôle: Marigold, the Sunshine of the Hospital. She loved to hear Miss Quackenbush's cries of admiration.

“Oh, Miss Trent, I took the carnations home to my boarding house, and we had them on the table in the parlour where all the folks could enjoy them, and I told them all my little lady at the hospital gave them to me, and my, didn’t they think you were generous!”

Or:

“I took your jelly in to that poor old Irishwoman in Ward B the way you asked me to, Miss Trent, dearie, and she was so pleased she nearly burst out crying. Miss McClellan was on duty, and she said, ‘Well, if you haven’t got the thoughtful patient!’ She said, ‘It’s not many patients are as thoughtful as Miss Trent!’ ”

She had not yet been allowed to see any one besides the doctors and nurses, although Mrs. Boyn-

ton came to the hospital every day to inquire, leaving her love and bowls of jelly; but one day Dr. Bellamy said:

“Would you like to see Mrs. Boynton to-morrow?”

“Oh, must I?” Marigold cried, with real terror in her voice.

“Good Lord, child, of course not, if you don’t want to.”

The old despair came back, slowly, like the first ripples that show the tide is coming in. Of course she had known that in time she must go back to Mrs. Boynton; that the clear quiet days must come to an end; but not yet! Panic took hold of her. She called to him who had saved her before.

“Dr. Bellamy—could I tell you how things are? I don’t know what to do—I don’t know how to begin, exactly—you’ll despise me—I despise myself——”

“Rot!”

“I’m not very happy,” said Marigold. She added, with a shaky smile: “I suppose I’m not the first woman to tell you that.”

It was to Dr. Bellamy’s credit that he only said mildly: “Well—some of them have,” thus dismissing the legion of ladies who had hinted of secret suffering and hidden tragedy.

“Could I tell you about it from the beginning? I’ve thought about it until I’m nearly crazy, and I

don't know what to do. Maybe you know I was engaged to Mrs. Boynton's son?"

"Yes, I know."

"Did you know he was killed the day we were to have been married? And you probably think that grieving for him is what made me ill—but it wasn't that—I killed him."

"Tell me how."

"I told him I didn't love him, just the night before. I hadn't loved him for ever so long, but I kept on pretending I did, because—I—. Every one thinks it was an accident, but I know he killed himself because of what I told him. I can't stop thinking about it. Dr. Bellamy, you don't know what it's like——!"

He wiped away her tears with his own handkerchief. "Listen to me," he said: "You're crazy; you didn't kill him any more than I did. Ten to one it was an accident, and if it wasn't, think of the thousands of men and women who are turned down, and go on making a decent job of life afterwards."

"Mrs. Boynton thinks I killed him—she says little things all the time—Dr. Bellamy, I wish I could die."

"Don't be silly. But why, in heaven's name, do you go on living with her?"

"You see, if I killed her son, I ought to give my life up to her."

“Good Lord, what rubbish! Haven’t you some one else to go to, some one you would be happier with?”

“No—there isn’t any one.”

“Why not live by yourself, then? Girls do, you know, and certainly it would be pleasanter.”

“But I haven’t any money—at least, only such a tiny bit.”

“Can’t you do anything to support yourself?”

“Nothing very much, I’m afraid. I taught some little children once, but I don’t really know anything. I’ve read aloud a good deal—and my grandmother used to like the way I arranged flowers; perhaps I could be a companion, or something, do you think?”

He wondered what would become of her, lonely and lovely and frail. She should have lived in an earlier day, when women were hedged about and hoodwinked: when she would have had a husband who only asked for sweet looks and gentle ways, who could have given her a hearth before which she would have embroidered his slippers, and a garden where her hoopskirts would have brushed against the flowers and set them swaying. In the rushing present, where a lonely woman needs efficiency and strength and daring, needs to push for herself and to shout for herself, what would become of Marigold Trent?

“You see, Dr. Bellamy, I’ll have to go back to

Mrs. Boynton. Nobody else wants me—and she has been good to me—she *has*—but, oh, I'm so unhappy!" She dabbed at drowned eyes, and murmured brokenly: "Please excuse me!"

George found it hard work to keep from taking her in his arms and comforting her as he would have comforted a frightened child. More and more she was filling his thoughts, and he had been astonished at the lift of his heart when she told him she had not loved Donald Boynton. He had grown accustomed to people being rather afraid of him, and Marigold had won him at first by her instinctive turning to him; it was as engaging as the trust a lost puppy shows when it chooses you to follow out of all the world, sure that you will be its friend; it was as warming to the heart as a baby's hand closing around your finger. Then, as her strength flowed back, her beauty shone for him, purified by her suffering, lighted from within. She lay in her coarse plain hospital nightgown, innocent of the obvious coquetry of lace and ribbons, her white face set in the gold of her hair, like a saint's face against its nimbus, her lovely smile shining for him when he came. To George she seemed everything he had searched for all his life, a dream come true; beauty, innocence, truth itself, perfect and crystal-clear.

CHAPTER XI

KNITTING, SERVANTS, SALVIA, AND THE NEIGHBOURS

MISS PATTERSON told the other night nurses, over their midnight mutton hash and stewed apricots, that Dr. Bellamy had an honest-to-goodness case on the little Trent girl. "He's sitting there talking to her almost every evening," she said: "Honestly, girls, sometimes I think I must be dreaming! *Him!* Well, he took his time, but now that he's fallen, he's fallen *kerflop!* And will you just kindly tell me how she vamped him? What I mean is, she's cute enough, and sort of pretty, in a way, I suppose, but she's not a bit the type that appeals to men——"

On this subject Miss Patterson was an authority, and amplified her topic, giving as an illustration of the type that did appeal to men an anonymous but recognizable sketch of herself.

"What do they talk about, Patterson?" asked another nurse.

"Well, I haven't been urged to stick around much, but this evening I got—let's see—mountain-climbing, wax-works, salad-dressing, something else—oh, yes, tadpoles! Don't you love it?"

“Passionate topics,” remarked Miss Jackson, rolling up her napkin.

“Well, I know, that’s all right, Jackson, but just compare it with great George’s usual tender and sunny chat—‘Put out your tongue’—‘Turn over’—‘Grr-rr-rr!’ ”

It was true that George had not for years been so human with any one as he was with Marigold. He felt young and exhilarated; it had been so long since he had talked anything but dry common-sense. She, too, let herself go with him, although at times his responses were disconcerting. She said one day:

“Do you know, it’s awfully upsetting to try to have a conversation with you—you never make the answer I’ve planned, and then of course I can’t say my next speech.”

“Do you mean you plan conversations ahead, like a play?”

“Always. Don’t you? But it’s very discouraging—I’ve planned so many talks with you to show, perfectly casually, what an unusual girl I am, and how much I’ve read, and how many places I’ve been to, and you never give me a chance—you always go tearing off on another subject.”

He gave a shout of laughter.

“What do I tear off on?”

“Subjects that show what an unusual person *you* are! Mountain-climbing, and liking storms at sea, and not being afraid of lions.”

“I never said I wasn’t afraid of lions!”

“You said you rode your bicycle straight at one, and rang your bell, and he ran away.”

“I only did it because I hadn’t my gun, and the bearers were back in the camp——”

“Same thing, exactly. But you get your things said because I recognize my clues; for instance, when you say ‘ocean’, I say, ‘Oh, Dr. Bellamy, doesn’t a storm at sea *terrify* you?’ and then all you have to do is to convey to me modestly but unmistakably what a brave man you are. But I tried ocean ever so hard with you, because I wanted to impress you with the number of times I’d crossed, and what a good sailor I am, and what did it make you switch off to? *Whales*, and all *they* made you think of was that I was to try taking Mammala the next day!”

“I’m sorry. The next time I go astray let out a yell, and I’ll try again. Let’s say ocean now.”

“Oh, I wish we were on one!” said Marigold earnestly.

“Gosh, so do I! With the water rushing past, all phosphorescent, and the mast swinging against the sky——”

“With the stars around it like a swarm of golden bees.” She thought: “I’ve been wanting to say that for ever so long.” She added aloud: “The sailors on the French liners—do you remember? Dark blue tam-o’-shanters with scarlet pompons on

top—and violet-blue blouses, or black jerseys with green or orange stripes——”

“Trousers rolled up to their knees,” said George: “and wooden shoes—can’t you hear them clattering up and down the decks? And those fierce black moustaches, enough to frighten you into fits.”

“Yes, if it weren’t for their gentle eyes.”

“She would always see the best in every one,” he thought tenderly.

Miss Patterson opened the door, looked in, and withdrew, murmuring, “Pardon me,” and George got up to go.

“You know, I’m afraid you’re almost well enough to go home,” he said regretfully, looking down at her. Marigold sighed.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I’ve been happy here.” Her eyes filled with emotional tears. “Dr. Bellamy, I haven’t known how—I’ve never thanked you for saving my life——”

“Don’t mention it,” George replied politely.

She laughed at herself, reluctantly, after he had gone. It was not the first time that he had made her feel as if a mental chair had been pulled out from under her as she went to sit down in a pretty attitude. He was so straightforward, so honest, everything about him was so real; there was no response there to affectation, to sentimentality or emotionalism. His truth was perfect and complete; she could not imagine him understanding shadings,

colourings, little flattering veils of misrepresentation, polite pretenses, garlands of white lies softening the outlines of ugly facts.

She respected him more and liked him better than any man she had ever known, and to keep his good opinion seemed vitally important to her. She became imbued with the idea of utter sincerity. Never again would she indulge in even the most harmless posing. She flung herself into her new part—Truthful Marigold.

She came back to the yellow house; she was an invalid no longer. Mrs. Boynton's real kindness was touched with the faintest feeling of resentment; obscurely, she disliked any one ever having a harder time than she was having, but she comforted herself with recollections of her own hospital days.

She sat with her knitting, a pale blue baby-sacque for Dorothy Douty, beside the hammock on the little upstairs porch where Marigold lay taking the afternoon rest that Dr. Bellamy had recommended; click-clack, went her needles; click-clack, went her tongue.

“Don't you think you might feel like getting up for your breakfast to-morrow morning, dear? Not that I want to rush you, but it's only that I can see Myrtle is getting sort of tired of fixing a tray, and goodness, if *she* goes I don't know *what* I'll do

—I've had *three* since you've been sick; I don't know what's gotten into girls nowadays, they don't appreciate a good home a bit, and *independent*—! Della, she was the one just before Myrtle, she left because I spoke perfectly pleasantly about finding snails walking around in the salad twice in succession; I'm just tired to death with them. I declare, I'd like to have changed with you, and have a nice rest in bed!"

"Of course I'll get up to-morrow—I've been dreadfully lazy," said Margiold, expecting to be contradicted.

"Well, I've thought all along if you'd only make an *effort*—not just let yourself *go*—does this little sleeve look big enough to you? Isn't it wonderful to think anything *can* be little enough to wear that! It seems like a miracle—I often think we don't half realize what a wonderful thing life is. I remember when I first knew Donny was coming, I made some tiny little dresses, and then instead of saying anything to Mr. Boynton, why, I just let one fall out of my work-basket one evening, accidentally on purpose, and he——"

She clapped her handkerchief to her mouth; but the rising tears were stopped by the clicking of the front gate; she darted to the porch railing.

"Who's that coming in here? Oh, that coloured minister begging for the African M. E. Church; well, he can just go away again, then, and I told

him so the last time he came. I never knew anything like it! Give, give, give! They must think a body's made of money. For *pity's* sake! If there don't go Carrie Marshall and Mrs. Carpenter together—last thing I heard they weren't speaking when they met. Mrs. Carpenter bought some of Mrs. Marshall's piccalilli at the *Lawn Fête*, and it didn't keep, and Mrs. Carpenter told every one, and it got around to Mrs. Marshall—go *home!* *Vernon!* Yoo-hoo! Vernon Wooster! Call your dog out of my yard! He's digging up the salvia! Go home, sir! That's that awful little Wooster boy and his nasty old dog—all that nice salvia Frank just put in this morning!"

She darted into the house, slamming the screen door behind her, and Marigold heard her burst out onto the downstairs porch, and break into lamentations over the ruined salvia.

Marigold lay, heavy with depression, listening to the familiar sounds that floated up to her. Mrs. Tuttle's man, next door, was cutting the grass, pausing now and then to shout over the hedge to Frank; across the street the little Rumford girl was practising, up and down the scale, striking the same wrong note each time; Mrs. Palmer, on the other side, was playing "I Hear You Calling Me" on the gramophone; and the man who sharpened scissors drew near and passed, ringing his plaintive bell. A bee blundered in, droning over

her head. In the distance there was a mutter of thunder.

She thought: "Is this life? These little unimportant things? Can they be reality? Are they worth living for? If only I could connect them—see that they were part of God—so that things would seem worth while." The thunder was real; in her heart she could see the heavy blue-black clouds rolling over the mountains, darkening the face of the water. The bee was real; bee-hives, set in a row near blue and yellow columbine; amber honey for the children's supper; golden bees woven in royal robes.

But cock-sure little Blossom Rumford, and her stumbling scales—Blossom, whose upper lip seemed always arched above a dribbling ice-cream cone; who teased her father to take her to the movies every night, and had "a case on Wallace Reid"—how was she part of one great design? And Mrs. Palmer, fretful and faded, afraid that people would forget that she had married beneath her. Her husband was real; knowing that he was slowly dying of some obscure disease, but going to work every day, and telling his dull little jokes, and on Saturdays bringing home half a pound of assorted chocolates, just as if nothing terrible were happening. He never spoke of his trouble, but sometimes there was a frightened look in his mild elderly eyes. He was real; more real than the thunder, or the mountains

and the rivers it rolled above; more real than the droning bee, more real than meadows full of honey-filled flowers. God showed Himself in Mr. Palmer, if one had eyes to see.

“After all,” Marigold thought, “what have I been that’s so wonderful, myself?” In a new mood of self-depreciation she looked back along her life. She seemed to see herself, a little figure growing smaller and smaller, pausing for a moment with Don under moonlit boughs of apple-blossom: drawing autumn leaves with coloured chalks for the children in the school-room: then a child herself, in a sunny garden: last of all, tinily bright at the end of the vista, her first real memory of herself, sitting on her mother’s bed under the great white tent of the mosquito-bar, playing with a silver lamb enclosed in a ball of glass.

The lamb in the ball of glass seemed to her a symbol of herself, of her whole life. No one had ever really touched her, she had never cared for any one as much as she cared for herself. Love and Death had come near her, but she had not really felt them, enclosed in self as the lamb was enclosed in glass. From the heart of her glass ball she looked out at the world, but nothing could touch her until the glass was shattered.

She spoke of her depression to George, when, a few days later, he came to see how she was getting on.

“Oh, what a battered old cage life is!” she said. “And yet the thought of being let out gives me the shivers, too. I get my seed and my water, and quite often a lump of sugar to peck at. I suppose I should be contented.”

“You’re bored to death, that’s your trouble. Brace up and do something, can’t you?”

“What? The idea of just doing any old thing, in order to fill up time, bores me to tears, and what is there real for me to do?”

“How about gardening? Don’t you like that?”

“Theoretically, I do. I like to picture myself in a chintz pinafore and a shady hat, watering pinks and pansies—but, Dr. Bellamy, look! Look at our garden here! After I’d dug up six dandelion plants and watered the porch begonias, what would there be to do? Frank would die if I tried to help him in the kitchen garden, and there isn’t any room for any other flowers except that awful salvia. Mrs. Boynton likes things as they are. She doesn’t want me planting vines and things, she says they bring mosquitoes—and it’s her house.”

“How about writing? Ever try that?”

“I don’t want to; it’s one of the few illusions left me, that I have it in me to write wonderfully. I can keep it just exactly as long as I don’t write a word, and I wouldn’t lose that heavenly feeling for anything. Think of all the words in my brain—in your brain—like bees in a hive—gold and sil-

ver words, and coloured words, fire words and ice words, and crystal words, and funny words and heart-broken words—I couldn't bear putting them on paper, and seeing those winged bright things turn dull and dry and stiff. Words——”

“‘Ah, you should see 'em come round me of a Saturday night,’ ” George murmured.

“*What?*”

“I beg your pardon; what you were saying made me think of Humpty-Dumpty on words—don't you remember? ‘When I make a word do a lot of work like that,’ said Humpty-Dumpty, ‘I always pay it extra.’ And the part about crowding round of a Saturday night, ‘for to get their wages, you know.’ ”

Marigold gave a reluctant half-laugh: “You never will let me be highfalutin! Well, I'll tell you another reason why I couldn't write; I couldn't in a million years think of a plot. And then if I ever did get a plot, I couldn't do conversations. I couldn't invent clever ones, and I wouldn't have the nerve to make people talk the way they really do. Just imagine if there was one of those what-do-you-call-its recording every word you spoke all day long, without your knowing it, and then at the end of the day it was all poured back into your ears; could you bear it? Even unusual people like you and me? I should never open my mouth again, I know. I could do descriptions, perhaps, except that I never can resist going on a perfect tear of adjectives—

no, we haven't found my vocation yet. Every one thinks he can write. 'You could write', and 'You have keen insight into character', are the two safe things to say to *everybody* when you're telling fortunes, you know. But Dr. Bellamy!"

"Yes?"

"Isn't there more to life than I can see? No matter what happens to me, I always feel as if I hadn't really begun living yet, that just a little further along there's something *wonderful*—of course, I suppose every one feels that way. I try and I try, but I never reach it—and yet I feel that it's there, ahead of me. Do you know what I'm trying to say?"

"I know; it's like a carrot hung in front of a donkey to keep it trotting along."

"And don't we ever reach our carrot, any more than the donkey does? Is it just a trick to keep us trotting?"

"I don't know," said George honestly. "If I were you I'd keep on trotting a little while longer, and see if you don't find out. You haven't been at it for any great length of time. How old are you, anyway?"

"Twenty-two," said Marigold, and waited, a shade complacently, for ejaculations of surprise. She was accustomed to people saying: "Why, I never would have dreamed it! You look just like

a little girl!" or, "I don't believe you're a *day* over seventeen!"

But George said nothing, and, after a moment, she went on, feeling rather flat:

"So you see—! I do feel low in my mind sometimes, Dr. Bellamy. What are we here for, and where are we going?"

"The stars are setting, and the Caravan
Starts towards the Dawn of Nothing—'"

She quoted the lines with a little nervous laugh, intended to show him that she was not taking herself too seriously. She hoped they would impress him; she was rather pleased with herself for remembering them, at the same time that she was really touched by their tragic beauty.

"You sound," said George, "like the Old Man of Cape Horn,

"Who wished he had never been born;
So he sat on a Chair till he died of despair—'

Buck up, child! I promise you one thing—any one who looks like you is going to have plenty of incident coming to them in their life."

CHAPTER XII

PROPOSAL

MRS. BOYNTON felt that Dr. Bellamy was coming entirely too often to see Marigold: she grew alarmed at the thought of what his bill would be. "Of course, *someone* has to pay for his auto and his riding-horse and all," she said. "But I don't see how he can have the face to keep on coming *here*, with Marigold really perfectly well." But when she found that there were to be no more bills, and that the visits were friendly ones, she was not much better pleased.

Marigold began to be happy again that summer. George was a splendid friend. He lent her books that really interested her; he took her for long drives and walks through lovely unfamiliar country. One day he took her with him to the woods: he was going to fish, and she could sit by the brook and read.

"Of course it's all *right*," said Mrs. Boynton, dubiously, over the telephone to Mrs. Marshall after they had gone: "He's years and years older than she is, and her physician, too, and he said a day out of doors would do her good, and I know they don't

think of each other as anything in the world but just very, very good friends, but still, it does seem a little queer that she'd take any pleasure in going round with *any* man, with Donald only dead a *year*—”

But Marigold was taking a great deal of pleasure: the green light falling through the leaves on to the deep soft moss, the vivid whorls of the May-apple leaves, the great lacy fern fronds dipping into the spray of the slipping brook, comforted and soothed her. “Oh, this does make me happy!” she said to George. “Greenness—coolness—peace—it does bless one, doesn’t it? Don’t bother about me, I’m blissful; go and fish.”

“You must be extremely quiet.”

“Oh, I’m much stronger now.”

“I don’t mean that. I mean so that you won’t frighten the fish.”

She laughed. “I’ll try to be quiet, Dr. Bellamy.”

“You couldn’t call me by my first name, could you?”

“I don’t know—I could try that, too. But I’ll probably feel too embarrassed to call you anything but ‘you’, ever again. Dr. Bellamy—oh, I didn’t mean to say that—!”

“Try again,” advised George. “Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes,” said the White Queen. I can call you Marigold with the greatest ease.”

He stretched himself on the moss beside her, absently turning the leaves of the book of poems that she had brought with an eye to impressing him. He seemed to have forgotten his fishing.

“When I was little I used to fish with Father,” Marigold said. “We’d take bits of Albert biscuit, and tie them to strings, but never any hooks, for fear of hurting the fish; I can’t tell you how exciting it was! I always thought, suppose a fish *should* eat our biscuit!”

“We used to fish from the window of my room at college,” said George. “We fished for horses, with apples and lumps of sugar for bait.”

“Did you ever catch one?”

“We caught a policeman once. Comfortable, Marigold?”

“Yes, thank you, Dr. Bellamy.”

“Who?”

“Yes, thank you, you. It’s a heavenly place, isn’t it? A place to dream in, if you were one of those people who make a point of having particular places to dream in.”

“I’ve often wondered about those people: how do they go about it, exactly? Do they go to their place and sit down and say: ‘Now I’ll dream until three-thirty?’ Let’s dream till six, and then have dinner?”

“I don’t know. I don’t go in for dreams.”

“You don’t, don’t you? You’re made of them.”

“Only the bad kind, the kind little Willies have after they’ve eaten green apples.”

“Marigold, you’re showing off.”

“Yes, I know I am,” she admitted, remembering that she was now Truthful Marigold. “Only I’m scared to death for fear you’ll think I’m whimsical. Whimsical! Pfui! I’ll tell you what I think about and wish for, when I dream until three-thirty—a little country place with a house like a cuckoo clock, and the scent of pine-trees, and cold-frames full of violets—you know the way the moisture clings to the under side of the cold-frame glass? And basket chairs on the lawn, where I’d have my tea. I always think of it as being tea-time at my house——”

“Very greedy of you. What else?”

“Then just one or two friends. Everything peaceful and fragrant and cool—no more fuss and emotion——”

He looked with love at her lovely wistful face, hearing all his happy childhood in her words. He wanted terribly to say: “Let me give you all you want—let me take care of you.” But the calm friendship that looked out of her eyes, clear and untroubled as a child’s, kept him from speaking.

Marigold, for her part, grew more and more anxious to be everything he thought her. She soon found that self-pity bored him, even if one had real troubles to pity one’s self for: so she gave up

any idea of attracting him through pathos, and tried for cheerfulness and courage. Pallor, fragility, shadowed eyes—they were not the things that charmed him. She felt that he liked her better, when, pink-cheeked and clear-eyed, she swung along untired by his side; and with the new happy companionship and interest, a new strength came to her. She had rather gone in for having no appetite, until one day George announced that he liked good hearty eaters, and after that she became a good hearty eater, and enjoyed it. Health was beautiful to him, and she wanted to be beautiful in his eyes.

To him she was an open window, letting in daylight and air; to him she shone like the sun, making his whole life bright.

One autumn day they walked together under a grey sky. Apple-trees hung heavy with fruit, and prettily-designed seed-pods lifted themselves, straight and strong, from among the straw-coloured ferns by the road-side. The pockets of Marigold's corduroy coat, and of George's knickerbockers, bulged with stolen apples, and presently they turned into the woods to rest and refresh themselves.

“It’s grand to get out-of-doors, and have a little sensible conversation,” Marigold remarked, her mouth full of apple. “Ever since the Doutys’s little girl was born, I haven’t heard a *thing* but babies. Poor Mrs. Boynton! I do feel terribly sorry for her, and yet what can I do? She looks

so sad all the time, and she *will* keep on talking about little feet running about the house——”

“Better than having her talk about little noses running about the house,” said George, in vulgar strain.

“George—I can’t imagine why Dorothy Douty thinks you’re unsympathetic. You’re the sympatheticest person I’ve ever known. Why does she, do you suppose? You haven’t another apple about you, have you?”

“Here you are. How many have you had, Marigold? Not that I want to criticize, but really, child! It does seem incredible that she shouldn’t like me, I admit. I suppose one reason is that I didn’t go into fits over her sufferings when she was having her children: but they were perfectly normal births. I might as well burst into tears over the trees these came from because they’d had apples. You’d think women would have gotten used to the idea of having children by this time, and be natural about it, but not they! I admit they have a rotten time, but it isn’t anything to what lots of people have to stand.”

“What, for instance?”

“Cancer—blindness. It’s fine to have a baby.” He added: “But after all, what’s so all-fired holy and solemn about it, when you consider cats and dogs—and water-spiders?”

He lit a cigarette. “Want one? Here, light

it from mine. I'll tell you something else that strikes me as the most utter twaddle, Marigold. The way women in books—real ones may do it, too. I don't know—write letters to their children before they're born: you know the type: 'My Dear Little Baby Whom I May Never See,' and then an orgy of egotism."

"I know," said Marigold, who up to that moment had planned to write just such a letter in case she was ever in an appropriate condition; who had, indeed, at the age of fifteen, written a letter "To My First Little Precious Baby in Case I Should Dye", that had for months moved her to tears every time she re-read it. "I know, and then the husband always finds it, and reads it with tear-dimmed eyes, and thinks: 'Oh, my! Ain't she noble, and ain't I low!' What time is it, George? Ought we to be starting home?"

"Not yet. Marigold——"

"What?"

"You don't look very happy to me."

"Probably those apples."

"No—what's the matter? Tell me, can't you?"

"Oh, George, nothing! Just the same old thing. Only it's been a little worse lately, for some reason. Mrs. Boynton's been feeling badly; the Douty baby, I think. Her son was engaged to Dorothy Douty once, you know, and I suppose she can't help feeling it might have been his baby. And then Don's

birthday made her—oh, it's nothing. I'm all right.” She dashed away her tears. “Really we must go.”

“Marigold—my darling——!”

“George!”

“I can't help it. You're like a little bird that's fallen out of the nest before it can fly. Let me take care of you!” He lifted her hands to his lips. “I didn't mean to tell you yet, but I can't help it—I love you—I love you terribly——”

“Oh, George! Oh, dear George, I'm so sorry! I never thought—I knew you liked me, but, oh, not this! Oh, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry!”

“You couldn't love me, darling?”

She shook her head. “Not that way. I do love you with all my heart as a friend—I look up to you, and respect you, and I'd rather be with you than any one else in the world—but that's different, isn't it?”

“Yes, that's different,” he agreed. “I love and worship you with all my heart and soul and mind and body. I'd give my life to make you happy. Don't say no yet—wait a little while. Let me try to teach you.”

“No, George, no, it wouldn't be any use. I did so much feeling altogether—when I was engaged, and then when Don died, and it was all my fault, and Granny died, and then when I was so unhappy here—I'm all burnt out. I'll never really feel any-

thing again. I don't *want* to feel again—I'm too tired."

"Oh, child, you're talking rot."

"No, George, I *know*—a woman knows."

"But a baby doesn't. You're only a baby. You haven't begun to live yet. Oh, Marigold, I want you so."

She sat in silence, while he brushed her tingling finger-tips back and forth against his cheek, and then let them rest on his lips. Finally she said:

"I'd give you the other kind of love if I could, George."

"I know you would, dear."

"I do care about you more than any one else in the world. I love to be with you, you make me feel so safe and happy—and our tastes are mutual, aren't they? I feel as if we think together so in harmony that when we talk it's as if each lifts the other up—high up—I can't imagine life without you."

"Marigold, you wouldn't take a chance? You wouldn't marry me, feeling the way you do? I'd be good to you, darling—I'd try hard to be patient and gentle—"

"You mean you'd be contented with what I would give you—with my just loving you *my way*?"

"I mean I want you so terribly that I'd worship you and thank God for you no matter how you

came to me. Perhaps after awhile you'd change——”

“No, no! I couldn't marry you if you were hoping that, George! You're the only person in the world I've never pretended to, and I can't pretend to you that there's any chance of my changing.”

“All right, then, you won't change. But marry me, and I'll bless and adore you all my life for just giving me the chance to take care of you. Only come to me, darling. We'll have wonderful times together. We'll go to queer places, and meet queer people. When we're married, I'll take you to a lonely island where every garden has a carved and painted woman, a figure-head from some old ship, straining towards the sea—and where little shaggy ponies pull great cart-loads of calla-lilies through lanes full of the sound of waves—or we'll go to Japan. You'd love the iris growing out of the roofs of the houses, and the children playing battledore and shuttlecock on the temple steps, with their cheeks like pink plush. We won't ever be rich, I'm afraid——”

“I know why not. I know how you have given everything to the hospital, and to the poor sick country people.”

“I don't do much. The patients are tiresome as the devil, most of them—but some of them are poor dumb creatures with bewildered eyes, all devotion. One old man came to the hospital last night. His

son was there a couple of months before he died, and the old fellow walked thirty miles to bring me a silver dollar and a basket of winter apples, to show his gratitude for what we did for Edward—Marigold, what can I do but give them what I have? But we'll always have enough."

"I don't care a scrap about being rich."

"I don't believe you do. I'll try to make you happy. I'll try not to bother you too much. Won't you marry me, my blessed?"

"You'd rather have what I can give than all some other woman's love?"

"Oh, damn some other woman's love! It's you I want—you!"

"George—you know what you said—about cats and dogs and water spiders? About having babies? Well—couldn't the kind of love that makes your heart thump and makes you sort of shiver—you know what I mean?"

"Perfectly."

"Couldn't that be unimportant, and the heart and mind kind that water-spiders *haven't*—couldn't that be the important kind? Because I have oceans of that for you."

"Oh, Marigold, you idiot! Water-spiders! Good God! Stop talking, darling. Stop looking inside of your little head. Just say this: say, 'George, I'll marry you.' "

She thought of escaping from the deadening

atmosphere of Mrs. Boynton's house, from the strain of pretense, and the constant demands for sympathy. She thought of the relief of being with some one who thought as she did, who always understood. He was her best friend: he would never fail her. She thought, catching her breath, of life without him, and said:

“George, I—I will, if you want me to.”

His head went down into her lap, one hand was seeking hers. She heard him whisper:

“Oh, my darling, you'll never know how much I love you!”

“I'll try hard to be a good wife.”

“Precious child, you can't think how absurd that sounds, when I look at you. It's like hearing a little blue butterfly, or a dew-drop, or a harebell, say it'll try to mend the clothes and make the puddings.”

She was charmed by the picture of herself, pure and ethereal. “Oh, what lovely things to call me!” she cried: “And you say them just as easily as you'd say: ‘Marigold, you have a smut on your nose.’ No extra expression or anything! I could have thought things like that, but when it came to saying them, I'd have been so self-conscious I'd have had to say them through my nose or something, just to show I wasn't really impressed with myself for thinking of them. Is that the way you *really* feel, George?”

“I can't tell you what I feel. We're both mad. I'm mad to let you marry me this way, and you're

mad to trust me. It would take courage enough, God knows, if you loved me, but to come to me feeling as you do—oh, my little soul, it makes me worship you and pity you. I wish for your sake I could take care of you and keep you happy without making you marry me."

"If you did, Mrs. Marshall wouldn't call on us!"

"No, she wouldn't, so you'll have to marry me. But you'll be as free as air. If you get sick of it you can go whenever you want to, only don't decide too quickly, Marigold, will you? Because it's inevitable that soon after you're married you'll feel that you've made a terrible mistake, and that I don't understand you. When things bother you, come to me and we'll talk them over together, won't we?"

"Just as we always do."

"Yes, just as we always do. Now come along, I must be getting you home." He pulled her to her feet, and brushed the dead leaves from her skirt with shaking hands, torn between his passionate love for her and his body's stern reserve. When he kissed her, just before they came out on to the road, her lips were as sweet, as cool, as impersonal, as flowers.

She was silent as they walked along together: in spite of herself, she was thrilled and a little frightened by this new George, when she thought of what she had promised. Life would be peacefully happy, spent with him, as soon as she grew accus-

tomed to the idea; but for the moment it caused her heart, that heart that she so firmly believed could never feel again, to pound and leap in her breast. She tried talking a little about the things they passed—yellow leaves against the heavy sky, brightening berries, a chestnut tree thick with burrs—but George answered at random, or not at all, so she gave herself up to thinking of herself, and her altered life; seeing herself, like a white flower at twilight, pure and remote, set apart to be worshipped and cherished. She enjoyed her thoughts, but was glad that George could not share them with her.

“I’m coming in now to tell Mrs. Boynton,” he said, as they drew near the house.

“I’d rather do it myself—really, I’d *much* rather, thank you, George,” she answered hastily. “I don’t suppose she’ll care much for the idea at first, but on the other hand, I should think she’d be awfully glad to be rid of me.”

“Then I’ll come to-night and talk to her.”

“No, please not yet. *Please*—it would be easier for me if you didn’t.”

“I don’t like your doing it all by yourself,” he said doubtfully.

“Just give her a little time. It will be such a surprise to her, you know—it is to me—I’m breathless——”

“Marry me soon. Loving you makes life seem terribly short. Say you will, soon, Marigold.”

“I will.”

“Darling, you’re not afraid?”

“Of you? I couldn’t be!”

“God knows I wish you could. I wish anything would make your little heart beat faster for me.”

They paused at Mrs. Boynton’s gate, and Marigold felt an involuntary flash of pleasure as she saw how small and white her hand looked as it lay in his. Frank was gazing at them with mild interest, leaning on his rake, so their parting was outwardly calm. But as she walked up the path between the rusty pink hydrangeas, Marigold felt quite faint as she thought of telling Mrs. Boynton.

CHAPTER XIII

CONSEQUENCES

MRS. TRIMLETT CANDEE was giving a bridge party that afternoon, and Mrs. Boynton wore her new hat, which was most suitable to the season, being trimmed with grapes and purple velvet dahlias. She put it on first, and then went to the top of the stairs and called to Marigold to come and hook up her dress for her.

Sieka, the maid, who was trying to make out a post-card that had come for her mistress in the afternoon mail, called up from the hall that Miss Marigold had gone out for a walk with Dr. Bellamy.

“For pity’s sake, *again*? Well, then, you’ll have to do me up—the flap crosses over and hooks here—no, no, Sieka, look, *here*—”

She stood before her mirror, while Sieka’s moist red hands pulled hooks and eyes together.

“You’re getting fat, yust the same!” the maid said, after a hard tug, while Mrs. Boynton held her breath, frowning anxiously.

“Mercy, Sieka!” said Mrs. Boynton, annoyed. “I only wish I *was*! I guess this dress got shrunk at the cleaner’s—you’re *sure* you got the right hook in

the right eye?" She craned over her shoulder. "Now if any one phones, tell them I'll be home around six." She pulled on her long white gloves with nervous tugs, and held her hands to her nose. "These certainly do smell of gasolene," she murmured: "Well, may be the fresh air——"

"Patticoat shows," observed Sieka dispassionately.

"Oh, my *gracious!* How about it now?"

"Yust a leetle."

"Now? Now? Well, *now* is it all right? My goodness, it's time I was half way there!" She dashed downstairs, flung open the kitchen door, called to the cook: "Well, Ingrid, I'm going now!" and darted into the motor.

She was in quite a fever of pleasant anticipation. She kept putting up one hand to make sure the new hat was secure, while she flapped the other gently, like a polite baby saying "Bye-bye", in order to get rid of the smell of gasolene. Her nose twitched a little, like a rabbit's, and she gave Frank advice about his driving in a constant and unheeded stream.

Mrs. Candee entertained very handsomely, her friends all said. This afternoon's party was one of her smaller affairs, but none the less handsome. Her guests sat in the sun-parlour, like so many cucumbers in a hot-bed, while the steam-pipes hissed and gurgled.

"Isn't this the most artistic home?" asked Mrs.

Poole, as she dealt the cards. "I always say this sun-parlour is as good as a trip abroad, it looks so *foreign*. That *darling* fountain——!" She indicated with rapture an elaborate affair with several minute sprays of water rising from a central cluster of red and green electric lights that resembled a salad of tomatoes and lettuce. There were other quaint touches here and there about the porch; a careless cluster of extremely new garden-tools, painted blue and old rose; an ash-tray held by a butler cut out of wood and coloured; a china blue-bird in a rose-wreathed cage. The trellises on either side of the door were covered with trails of imitation ivy.

"Yes, it certainly is lovely," Mrs. Boynton agreed. She bit into a chocolate, and made a hurried grab at her mouth as its contents proved to be liquid. "Mercy! What a thing to have at a card party. Now my fingers are all sticky!"

"I guess you made a mistake, Mrs. Poole, I'm one card short," said Mrs. Warner.

"Well, for goodness' sakes! I'd better pay attention to business and not talk so much—excuse me, girls! Miss Trent isn't here this afternoon, is she, Mrs. Boynton? I saw her as I was coming over, and I thought maybe she was coming here, but then I didn't know, she sort of looked as if she was dressed for a good long hike, and she was with Dr. Bellamy. I trilled at her, but I guess she was

too much occupied to hear me. *Now, then, we're right this time!* Your bid, Mrs. Dutton."

"One heart," said Mrs. Dutton, thickly, through a piece of nougat. "He's quite attentive, isn't he, Eva? Seems to me I'm always hearing about them being together."

"Mercy, no! They're good friends, but not a thing in the world more. No indeed, Lily, I'm afraid my little girl hasn't any heart for that sort of thing." She gave a great sigh. "I wish she *could* learn to care for some one, but I know perfectly well that she'll never marry. It's touching to see the way the little thing clings to me. She seems to feel as if Donald was with us still——"

She touched her eyes rapidly with her handkerchief, and smiled brightly, while the other three ladies heaved admiring and sympathetic sighs. Mrs. Dutton gave her hand a squeeze, murmuring: "Eva, you're wonderful," and Mrs. Poole felt quite sacrilegious as she said respectfully: "Your bid, Mrs. Boynton."

Altogether it was a delightful afternoon, and as Mrs. Boynton walked home (for Frank stopped work at five o'clock) she felt in a glow of loving-kindness towards all the world.

Frank had said there was going to be a storm, and had spent the afternoon languidly staking the few dahlias and the last frail roses, and by the time Mrs. Boynton reached her own front door the wind

was rising and the first drops fell. There was a light upstairs that meant Marigold was at home; and Sieka, who wanted to go to the cinema, was watching for her mistress.

“Hoo-hoo! Come on down, dearie, dinner’s ready!” Mrs. Boynton called; and added, as they seated themselves: “Not that I feel like eating any—we were all telling Mrs. Candee nobody need order any dinner if they were going to one of *her* parties first! She always does things so handsomely—almost *too* well, I think.”

Her society voice and manner were still clinging to her. “Well, Sieka, what is Ingrid giving us tonight?” she questioned affably, although she herself had ordered the veal cutlets and stewed tomatoes, or, rather, had accepted the cook’s ordering of them. “We had the most delicious ice-cream from The Goody Shop, coffee cream in spun sugar baskets, and those little cakes with coloured icing sweet-peas. I saw poor Mrs. Miner putting three into her bag, when she thought no one was looking—to take home to the children, I suppose, but it did seem a *little* funny. But then I suppose it will be a great treat for them, poor little things. It’s funny how Mr. Miner just can’t seem to get on. Mr. Boynton always used to say it was because he hadn’t any bump of stick-at-it-iveness. She’s still wearing that old maroon velvet hat. Don’t you care for your cutlet, dear?”

Marigold, who had been sitting in a dream, thinking of George, remembering her promise to him, wondering when it would be best to tell Mrs. Boynston her news, roused herself with a start, and began to eat her stewed tomatoes. She would let her finish her dinner first, the way diplomatic wives always let their husbands dine in peace before hurling thunderbolts at them.

“Mrs. Candee had the handsomest dress—all écrù lace—really, it was beautiful! First there was a sort of under-dress of black satin, and then the lace——”

(“*Oh, my darling, you'll never know how much I love you!*”)

“Through, Marigold? All that nice cutlet going to waste! I’m afraid your walk didn’t give you a very good appetite. Mrs. Poole said she saw you with Dr. Bellamy—doesn’t he *ever* have to work? Mercy, how it blows! Just as well Frank tied up those dahlias. Mrs. Candee had the most exquisite cut glass vase full of gladiolas, I just wished you were there to see them. I kept thinking how you always say pink gladiolas make you think of canned salmon—such a notion! I’ll have just a speck more of the custard, Sieka.”

(“*Marry me soon. Loving you makes life seem terribly short.*”)

The memory of his words gave her a sudden quick stab of physical pain, a sudden unexpected longing

for his presence. They were in the parlour now. She must tell Mrs. Boynton that she was going to marry George.

“Well, you haven’t told me anything about *your* afternoon,” Mrs. Boynton went on amiably. “Did you and the doctor have a pleasant walk? I don’t suppose you had time to get me a library book, did you?”

“Oh, Mrs. Boynton, I’m so sorry! I forgot all about it.”

Mrs. Boynton smiled patiently. “Never mind, dear, it doesn’t matter. It’s just that you said you would, or I could have gone myself; I walked right past there. Or I could have sent Frank, just as easy as not—but it doesn’t make any difference——”

“I’m so sorry.”

“It was only that you *said* you would, dear. Well——”

Marigold plunged desperately.

“Mrs. Boynton, I’m ashamed. You’ve been so good to me. I can never, never tell you how I feel about it—and I’m afraid I haven’t shown very well how grateful I am to you. I must have been an awful nuisance, heaps of times.”

“Never mind, I’ll send Frank for it to-morrow,” said Mrs. Boynton, still thinking of the library book. “As I say, it would have been easy enough to stop in for it myself, if it hadn’t been for your *saying* you’d go.”

“How shall I tell her?” Marigold asked herself. “How would George tell her? He’d always do it in the simplest way—he’d say, ‘Marigold and I are going to be married.’” She suddenly heard her own voice say: “Mrs. Boynton, George Bellamy has asked me to marry him.”

“Asked you to *marry* him?” She looked at Marigold with her mouth dropping open. “Well, he must be crazy. What did you say to him?”

“I told him I would.”

“You told him you *would*? ”

“Dear Mrs. Boynton, don’t think I’m ungrateful, don’t think I’ve forgotten everything you’ve done——”

Mrs. Boynton began to cry. She stood with her hands hanging down at her sides, not moving until Marigold came close to her. Then she shrank away from her, wailing:

“Donald! Donald! Donald!”

“Mrs. Boynton—*please*——”

“Donald, my darling! Oh, if I could only come to you! All alone, all alone! If I could die!” Suddenly she turned on Marigold. “You can’t marry that man! You can’t! You’re Donald’s! He gave you everything he had—he gave you all his love, and he gave you his life. If he’d never known you, he’d be alive to-day—my boy, my beautiful, laughing boy, turned into a broken, bleeding heap

because of you—and you won't even give him memory——”

She began to wail and sob, beating the air with her hands, and turning her head away from the glass of water that Marigold brought.

“Don't pretend you're sorry for me, when you've been laughing behind my back at how you were fooling me, and letting that man make love to you!”

“Mrs. Boynton, dear Mrs. Boynton, please listen to me!”

Mrs. Boynton, her eyes tight shut, collapsed to the floor, and lay there moaning, “Donny, Donny!” Suddenly she sat up. “Marigold, he was all I had. He loved me until he met you, but after that there wasn't any one else in the world. You took his love away from me, and you took his life away from me. I haven't any one left but you. I need you so! I'm not young any more; nobody cares about me. If you leave me, I'll die. All alone, all alone——!”

She was crying with a child's abandon, the tears rolling down her swollen face and into the corners of her mouth. Marigold looked at her, sick with pity. What she said was true. Marigold had taken from her all that was most dear. How could she leave her now, this frightened old child who clung to her with trembling hands? Faint in her heart she heard what George had said:

“*Oh, my darling, you'll never know how much I love you!*”

“Marigold, come to my room,” Mrs. Boynton was saying through her sobs. “Come, I want to show you something.” She stumbled up the stairs, not bothering to lift her skirt, although she wore her best dress. “Sit here by the lamp.” She unlocked a bureau drawer, and with shaking hands lifted out its contents. “See this little curl, when he was a baby—isn’t it soft? And his little cap—look how tiny! You could hardly believe he’d grow into such a tall man. And here’s his reader, Marigold—his papa and I didn’t know he could read a word yet, and one day he brought his reader home and read this to us—this page that begins, ‘This is a happy band of boys’! I can see his dear little face just *shining*, he always loved to give us a surprise. And this wreath of roses he wore to be Cupid once—he just looked like a little angel. Marigold, he was such a *dear* little boy!” She brought out photographs, letters, the picture frame he had made himself for her birthday, valentines that he had sent her.

“I had all that—that love and devotion—that companionship—and now I have nothing,” she said.

Marigold looked down at a picture that she held—Don when he was nine or ten, with his dog. Both gone now, where? How sad, to have been so alive, so full of plans, of hope, of fun, only to come to a little quiet dust.

“And look, look!” Mrs. Boynton said eagerly: “I never showed you these, that I found after Donny died, because I was jealous of you. They were in his room, with your letters.” She gave Marigold a box full of little things. There were snapshots—here was one that Don had taken of her when they were first engaged. What work it had been to get Coco up on the sun-dial—she could see his little black legs spraddling out yet—and how they had laughed together! Here was a handkerchief with her initials; an envelope containing dead crumbled flowers and a slip of paper on which was written, “Marigold gave me these when we said good-by yesterday”; one of the invitations to their wedding. She opened a folded paper from a game of Consequences that they had played that first evening at Miss Hopper’s, and read through tears the silly words in the different handwritings.

“Shy
Marigold
Met noble
Mr. Boynton
At the bottom of the sea
He said ‘Three cheers for the red, white, and blue!’
She said ‘Don’t get fresh’
He gave her a tender glance
She fried it in lard

The consequences were that they went up in a balloon

And the World said 'I told you so.' "

He had kept ever since that first evening. She saw again his face, brilliant with laughter, as Miss Hopper read it aloud. A tear splashed down on the paper, and lay there, shining like a star.

"I'll stay with you, if you want me," she said to Mrs. Boynton. Her heart felt heavy with hopelessness. She had loved Donald so intensely once, and now he was nothing to her but a pitiful memory, to be thought of tenderly, gently. Surely that meant that this strange new longing to be with George that surged through her would in its turn become only a memory. This new wave of feeling that broke over her, drenching her through and through, would in its appointed time draw back, ebbing as those other waves had ebbed. Each one must die, each one must be forgotten. What did it matter how one felt for a little while?

She helped Mrs. Boynton to put away Don's things, heated milk for her while she undressed, and kissed her good-night, kind and preoccupied, like a mother who hides her trouble from her child. She sat beside her until she fell asleep, then she tip-toed from the room and down the stairs, and opened the front door. She must go to George and tell him that she could not marry him.

CHAPTER XIV

STORMY NIGHT

MARIGOLD let herself out of the front door and hurried down the path, along which broken balls of hydrangea flowers were being rolled by the wind. The rain beat against her and drenched her, as she fought her way along the black mile that led to George Bellamy's house. Ordinarily she would have been terrified at being out by herself on the lonely country road, but now she had only one thought in her mind—to reach George, and tell him she could not marry him. She did not think of telephoning to him, or writing. Her need of his actual presence was too strong for that.

His servant had gone to bed when the bell rang, and George opened the door himself.

“Marigold! What’s the matter?”

“George!” she cried, half fainting. “I had to come——”

He made her sit by the fire, and piled on wood until the blaze roared up the chimney. He pulled off her wet shoes, that came off with a sucking sound, and brought brandy for her to drink.

“George, I can’t marry you—I’ve promised Mrs.

Boynton I won't. I had to come and tell you," she sobbed through chattering teeth.

"Wait a minute," he answered in a preoccupied voice. "You can't keep those wet things on. I'll find you something."

"But, George——" she began; and paused, a little taken aback at his seeming so unshaken by the blow.

She changed, in front of a bedroom fire, into a great padded coat that George had brought from India—indigo velvet striped with magenta and lemon and rose—and put on her cold bare feet large slippers of palest blue, fresh from their Christmas swathing of tissue paper, and knitted by those elderly sisters, Mattie and Bessie Hall, more generally known as Battie and Messie. George's heart was heavy with love for her as she came and stood in the doorway like a little lost child, her face white above the vivid colours of the velvet coat, her hair still wet and dark with rain. He could have shouted and cried because she had come to him through the storm, but her trembling mouth and the dark stains under her eyes warned him to be as unemotional as possible.

"Now fire ahead, darling, and tell me what's the matter."

She told him, her breath catching in a sob now and then, and he listened, frowning.

"So you see I *can't*, George. I thought I could, but I *can't*. I'd never forgive myself as long as I

lived, since I've seen how she'd feel. And I had to come and tell you——”

She paused: George seemed to be taking everything so quietly.

“You do see that I can't marry you and leave her, don't you?”

“You know what I think about it, but you can't if it's going to make you unhappy, and you certainly can't marry me and *not* leave her. Cheer up! You don't love me, so there isn't that to worry about; and nothing can interfere with my loving you, so there we are. You're to do exactly as you please. If you really want to stay with Mrs. Boynton, you're to stay with her.”

“And we'll still be friends? George, where's my handkerchief?”

“Stop crying! Stop crying, you'll spot my Jodhpur coat. Here, use my handkerchief and mop yourself up. I'm going to make some cocoa for you. You can come out in the kitchen with me and sit by the stove unless you're too grand. And then as soon as your clothes are dry I'm going to take you home.”

“You didn't say whether we'd still be friends.”

“You bet your life we will.”

Marigold felt let down. She thought men under these circumstances generally turned rather white about the mouth and said: “Not that—yet!” or: “It must be all—or nothing,” or words to that effect. Of course she wasn't in love with George, and of

course she was glad if he wasn't unhappy; but this was not what she had expected.

"I don't believe you care a bit," she wailed.

George put a hand on either arm of her chair, and bent over her. "Don't be silly," he said, his voice sounding harsh and angry. "You know I love you—that I'm crazy mad for you, and that I always will be. It's not so damn much fun to want you like hell, and not be able to do anything for you but lend you bedroom slippers; but if I can't have you, I'm not going to whine about it. So don't be absurd. Now come along and have some cocoa."

She could not sleep that night. She lay awake to think of him. She thought of him, heavy-hearted, through the days that followed. It made her feel desperately lonely and forlorn to see how much himself he was, cheerful and occupied. Perhaps it was as well that she had decided not to marry him—perhaps he had found that after all he did not love her. Perhaps his feeling had changed as much as hers had.

For it was not long before there was no use in denying to herself that she had fallen in love with George. Every bit of her was his, now that he no longer asked for anything. She could not even tell whether he wanted anything. He was overworked that winter, and had not much time to be with her; and in January he went away, to be gone for several

months. He wrote to her, but he was busy, and his letters were short and unsatisfactory. She cried out her heart to him in the dark, and, after a proper interval, wrote back; accounts of the Book Club's Shakespeare tableaux, with Mrs. Poole as Portia, in her husband's college cap covered with red crêpe paper; or descriptions of the pine-trees along the river, changed into silver trees by the frozen mist. Sometimes something in one of his letters would comfort her, would make her think that still under his calmness he loved her as wildly as she now loved him. But she must be sure. Suppose she told him how she had changed towards him, only to find that he no longer needed her. Suppose that he loved her because he thought of her as too pure for worldly passions, sacred and shining above him. Could the worshipper still kneel to the saint who stepped down from her shrine?

Suppose he had found another girl to love.

Marigold tried, as she had tried before, to occupy herself with books; or she would write long confidential letters to George that she never sent; but she had only to begin to read or write to make Mrs. Boynton begin to chatter. "I must say, I like a little life and fun," Mrs. Boynton often said. "Somehow I never could act like some people, just sit like a bump on a log. I just used to hate to see Mr. Boynton with his nose in a newspaper, and

never a sound out of him. It used to get on my nerves so!"

"Writing a letter?" she asked Marigold one evening, as she came back into the parlour after a long scream at the telephone about some tissue-paper cherry-blossoms that were to be made to decorate the tables at a coming church supper.

Marigold hastily pulled a blotter over the "Dear George" at the top of her page.

"Mercy! It must really seem *strange* to sit still and write letters! I wish I could sit down quietly and just write all the letters I owe, but now just as I thought I was going to have a little time, Mrs. Krohl calls up and asks will I undertake making cherry-blossoms enough for four tables. It's funny how it's always the busiest people who get asked to do the most, isn't it? I've noticed they're the only ones that ever seem to have the time to do anything. Take Mrs. Wentz or Mrs. Bicknell, what have they to do? You'd think they'd be only too *glad* to help, but no, Mrs. Krohl says they say they haven't time! I thought maybe you'd enjoy helping me, but of course you don't have to if you don't want to, I can manage somehow. Mrs. Krohl says they decided to have all the decorations Japanese—the cherry-blossoms, of course, and Mrs. Prettyman has some Japanese umbrellas she'll lend, and they're going to rent the lanterns the Methodist Church bought last summer for their lawn *fête*. Then the

girls who wait on table are going to dress up in kimonos, and Mrs. Krohl wanted to know if we had anything we could lend Juanita. I said I thought maybe you'd lend her your pink one, but of course I couldn't say for *sure* until I asked you. Well, don't let me interrupt you, dear."

She sat down, and flapped open the evening paper. Marigold began to write again.

"Oh, Marigold! There's a William S. Hart picture at the Queen to-night—he's always so good. I suppose it would be foolish to try to go, it's snowing out—I hate to miss one of his, still, it *is* pretty late. Did I tell you Mrs. Schaefer told me she heard from some one very much interested in motion pictures that he'd had a very sad love story years ago? She wasn't sure if the girl died or what, and of course it may not be true, but it would account for that wistful look, wouldn't it? Well, I mustn't talk to you if you want to write. You don't happen to be writing to Miss Hopper, do you?"

"No," said Marigold, determined not to tell to whom she was writing.

"Oh, well, I simply thought if your letter was to Miss Hopper, I'd ask you to give her my very kindest regards——."

She finished reading the paper, yawned, and played a little tune on her teeth with the edge of her eyeglasses. Then she said:

"If you're through that important letter in time,

dear, we might have a game of double dummy. Don't hurry, just if you happen to get through. Oh, by the way, Mrs. Marshall didn't send back my magazine with that continued story this afternoon, did she? I'm so interested in it, and she borrowed it before I had a chance to see how it turns out. If she'd only sent it back, I could be reading it while you were finishing your letter. It's called 'Many a Slip'—have you been reading it? There's this man who has enormous oil grants in the West if only he can get there in time with the papers——"

"What papers?" asked Marigold, giving up.

"Well, whatever papers you need for oil lands—I sort of forget that part, it was very technical—anyway, these four men, they really are more like devils, decide to keep him from getting there in time, and to get the papers from him and get the oil themselves, and they plan to get him as a captive and torture him until he tells them where the papers are, but he overhears their plans in a Chinese restaurant, and he don't know *what* to do, and then he happens to meet this second man named Peter who looks so like him that no one can tell the difference between them, and Renshaw, that's the first man, offers him five thousand dollars to take his place, but of course he doesn't tell him *why*, or about these four devils, so then he disguises himself and goes off with the papers and the devils get hold of Peter, and lock him up in this lonely room, thinking he's

Renshaw, and torture him in every way, but still he won't tell where the papers are, and any way he doesn't know anything about them, so he couldn't if he wanted to. So meantime Renshaw has arranged to have Lila stay with his mother in the country——”

“Lila?” murmured Marigold, dazed.

“Yes, I told you, the girl he's engaged to, so he goes out there to get the papers—oh, I forgot, he didn't have them after all, they were out there all the time. I got mixed up. Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes, so the devils hear of it, and two of them stay in town to torture Peter, and two of them go out to the country to get the papers, and they disguise themselves, but still Renshaw recognizes them, but he pretends not to, and they pretend they are a cook and a butler who want a place, so he said he'd call his mother, and then he went into his mother's room and dressed in her clothes, with a black veil over his face, and came out and pretended he was his mother, and escaped with the papers in his bonnet while *they* thought they were waiting for *him* to come back. So anyway, by this time Peter and Margery have fallen in love with each other——”

“Who's Margery?”

“Seems to me I told you, didn't I? Oh, didn't I? Well, she was a very beautiful girl that the chief of the devils had brought to make Peter tell where the papers were, but she fell in love with Peter, and

when the devils planned to kill him that night she fixed up the bolster and the washbasin in Peter's bed, because you see the devils thought she was for them and against Peter, and when they came in to kill him they left the door open, and she and Peter ran out, and where the last installment stopped they had just come out of the house and Renshaw was just riding up to the door on his tricycle——”

“Tricycle!” gasped Marigold, dazzled by a vision of a gentleman in lady's clothes and a long crêpe veil, sedately trundling along on three wheels.

“Oh, you know what I mean,” Mrs. Boynton said impatiently. “Tricycles—bicycles—what do you call the things?—motorcycles—and all the spies set to watch the house were closing in on them, and that's the way it was left!”

But Mrs. Boynton was not always in such a cheerful mood. At first, after that stormy autumn night, she had fluctuated between demonstrative affection, and suspicious watchfulness; presently, she told herself that Dr. Bellamy and Marigold had gotten over their foolishness. But she never missed an opportunity to criticize him.

Out of the boredom and loneliness and confusion of the months that followed, one thing grew clear to Marigold, simple and sure as breathing and sleeping, and that was her love for George. At last something more important to her than herself was breaking in to her, teaching her anguish and ecstasy. But

she had only begun her difficult lessons: there still were times when she saw herself, lovely and lonely and self-sacrificing, with pangs of pleasurable self-pity.

CHAPTER XV

BLUE SKY AND THE RECTORY PARLOUR

MRS. BOYNTON had to go to town to have her glasses changed, and, as trains were inconvenient, she wrote to her Cousin Lou Campbell to ask if she might spend the night with her. Cousin Lou replied that she would be delighted, and that no better time could have been selected, for there was to be a musicale that evening given by two young ladies who dressed up in hoop-skirts, and played upon the harp and the spinet, and sang old English ballads, and she had just been saying it was the sort of thing Cousin Eva would revel in. So Mrs. Boynton started off on Tuesday morning, with a packet of sandwiches and a Western romance by Mr. Zane Grey, for physical and mental refreshment, as she would not reach Cousin Lou's house until nearly three.

"Now you're *positive* you don't mind being left alone?" she asked Marigold, as she stepped into the motor that was to take her to the station. "Be *sure* to catch the windows, and don't forget the cellar door—I can't trust Hulda one particle. I really wish I wasn't going, I'll worry every minute till I get home. If it rains, get Frank to take in the ham-

mock. I told Hulda and Sieka they could go to the movies, you wouldn't mind having supper a little early, and if you get nervous, Mrs. Marshall wants you to come over and spend the evening with them, and Mr. Marshall will bring you home. Oh, and Marigold, if Chambers telephones about the awnings while I'm away, tell him——”

“Time we startin', Mis' Boynton,” put in Frank.

“All right, Frank, for goodness' sake don't let's miss that train—oh, mercy! Marigold! My daffodils for Cousin Lou! On the hall table—quick!”

As the car rolled away, she was still calling back directions.

Marigold stood on the front steps and considered. A day and a night of her own, shining and empty; how should she spend her treasure? Nothing particularly interesting suggesting itself, she decided to weed the daffodil bed, stripped of its flowers for Cousin Lou's delight. She felt almost happy as she worked; the sun was so delicately warm; the blue sky paved with such ethereal cobblestones of filmy white; the lawn dotted with such big dandelions.

She heard a motor stop in front of the house, and, looking up, saw George Bellamy stepping over the small privet hedge and coming towards her. Her heart leapt to him; life flamed to lovely colour. The dandelions were no longer dandelions, but fiery golden stars in a green heaven—stars that she walked on as she went to meet him.

“Marigold!”

“George! I thought you were still away.”

“Haven’t been back long. Gosh, it’s wonderful to see you—you look more like a bunch of flowers than ever.”

“I look like what you plant flowers in—I’m dirty as a pig.”

“Marigold, I have the whole day free—will you come and bum around with me? I have some sandwiches in the motor. You don’t need a hat, do you? You go and get in, and I’ll tell Mrs. Boynton I’m kidnapping you.”

“Mrs. Boynton’s away till to-morrow. I’d love to come, George, only I’m so grubby; will you wait till I put on a clean frock?”

“No, I’m afraid you’d spoil the effect. How’ve you been, young one?”

“All right, thank you.”

“Happy?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“You’re welcome—not that I believe you. Oh, Marigold——!”

“What, George?”

“Nothing—only being with you again. Do you know, always, all the time when I’m away from you, I keep up an imaginary conversation with you, Marigold?”

“George, you *are* nice.”

She gave herself up to the shining day: she tried to put out of her mind the thought that it must end. The heart of each was a fountain of love for the other, and they spoke to each other in voices singing with secret happiness, although they talked of trivial things. Leaving the motor in a friendly farmyard, they walked through the woods, past a clearing where bits of stone wall marked the place where there had once been a home, and old twisted apple-trees still put forth small difficult buds; then out on to a little plateau that hung above the earth like a magic carpet flying through the sky. Far below them lay the bright green valley, with silver threads of brooks; with apple-trees like tight bouquets, shading from red to white; with sheep and little lambs; the whole surrounded by blue waves of hills. Beautiful and touching, it was like some heavenly meadow where little angels might play their happy games.

They ate their sandwiches and drank their brook-cooled ginger-beer, sitting on a carpet of white and blue violets and wild strawberry leaves. "We'll come here again when the strawberries are ripe," George said.

"See the trees climbing the hill; every shade of green, except those white oaks that look like silver trees."

"Oh, how nice everything is! May I have a

cigarette, too, please? I feel as if we were in a book, don't you?"

George, carefully removing a small spider that was walking across her dew-stained canvas sand-shoe, made no reply.

"Don't you?"

"Don't I what?"

"How my conversation entrals the man! Don't you feel as if we were in a book—the lambs and the apple-trees down there—and ginger-beer—and both of us having cigarettes?"

He laughed. "You baby! What do you always want to be in a book for? Life's a lot better than any book, and a lot worse, too; and duller, and more exciting. Things happen——"

He broke off, and for a time they were silent. Marigold lay looking down at the pattern of leaf and starry blossom, watching the tiny insects coming and going through grass and flower-stems, like travelers in a forest; seeing George's brown hand absently pulling the short-stemmed violets. Turning a little, she could see all his long body, dressed in old riding-clothes. She could look at him as much as she wanted, for his eyes were on the far blue hills. She must fill her heart now with food for coming days and nights of hunger. His bare head, his thin tanned face, his blue direct eyes; she must make each detail hers forever.

He looked at her suddenly, with his charming smile, and she grew faint with love for him.

“Marigold—ducky——”

“Yes?”

“Will you do something for me?”

“Of course I will, George.”

“Marry me this afternoon? Darling! Please?”

She could not speak; she could not believe that she had heard him.

“Marigold, my precious, please! I’ve got to have you now—I don’t dare wait any longer. We can’t go on this way. It’s death for me, having you unhappy. I know how you feel about me, but, Marigold, give me a chance! Come to me. Come now, darling——”

“George, George, I can’t!”

“Are you afraid of me? I’ll be good to you. You can’t be more wretched than you are now, and I’ll try all my life to make you happy.”

“It isn’t that—you know it isn’t that—it’s Mrs. Boynton. I can’t leave her——”

He took her hands in his. “Look at me,” he said; “No, look straight at me, Marigold. And listen. That’s all damned nonsense. You know I’ve never lied to you, and I’m not lying now. You’re going to marry me this afternoon. I let you go once, before, and I lost you, but I’m not going to lose you this time. Everything’s arranged—I’ve got the license, and see, here’s your little wedding-ring; Mr.

Banks expects us on our way home; we'll just stop there a minute, and be married."

His words sounded sure, but there were beads of sweat about his mouth, and his eyes were full of terrible anxiety.

"Unless you come to me now, you never will, Marigold. You'll go on as you are, day after day, getting a little older and a little more settled, with your heart withering up inside of you, and a hard rind growing around it, until you can't feel anything any more, love, or beauty, or even pain. Sometimes you'll be almost happy when there's something you like for supper—*you*—! And what will it all be for? So that every now and then you can feel the smug glow that comes after self-sacrifice, and so that she can feel it towards you. You've made a picture of yourself as a martyr, and that's what you're selling your soul for. Marigold, for God's sake, don't go on with it!"

She looked away, down into the valley that lay like a green cup full of afternoon sunshine; there was no sound anywhere except distant cowbells and the hidden brook. For a long time they sat in silence, his eyes on her face. She tried to think of Don; she tried to think of Mrs. Boynton, who would be sitting now at the oculist's, seeing A, B, and C upon his chart, and not being sure about D, looking forward to the young ladies who would soon be singing songs full of Hey Nonny Nonnys and Derry

Down Derrys. Then George drew her towards him again, and her thoughts vanished like snow-flakes falling on the sea.

“Marigold—you’ll come?”

Laughing and crying, she nodded. His arms went around her, crushing her, and he said roughly:

“I’ve got to be honest with you—I’m going to do my damnedest to make you every bit my own. I told you I’d be contented with the love you had to give me—but I’m not. I’ve got to have all of you—I’m mad for you. I’ll try to be decent, but don’t come if you’re afraid.”

She lifted her lovely face to him.

“I’m not afraid. I love you. I didn’t the first time you asked me to marry you, but almost ever since I’ve loved you so that I’ve nearly died—George——”

His mouth found hers, and stopped her words. Drowning in the waves of love, lifted by the waves of love, they clung together. He strained her to him, kissing her lips, her eyes, the soft curve of her neck, as if he could never let her go.

“Am I hurting you? Little Marigold! I want to hurt you, and I’d die to keep you from ever being hurt again. Tell me that you love me.”

“I love you, George.”

“My girl—you’re mine, all mine.”

“All yours, for always and always.”

Lifting her hands, palms upward, to his lips, as

a worshipper lifts the Chalice, she heard him whisper:

“I adore you.”

Soon he said that they must start. In the clearing, under the apple-trees, Marigold paused.

“You’ll let me stop and change my dress?”

“I will not. I won’t let you out of my sight till you’ve married me.”

“This—for my wedding-gown?” she said with a tremulous smile, touching her childish dress of faded gingham. “I’ve cobwebs in my hair, George—and my hands—they’re black. I look like something that’s been thrown away for *weeks*—”

“You’re so beautiful that I can’t look at you, for tears.” He stripped a branch of its blossoms, and closed her fingers over them. “White flowers for a bride,” he said.

At the sight and scent of the pale silver flowers and small red buds a memory awoke and stirred. Moon-drenched boughs of apple-blossom, and a man’s voice that cried in her heart, and her own that replied:

“Tell me that you love me.”

“I love you, Don.”

“And you always will. Say you always will—darling—darling—”

“Always,—always.”

But George had come. With terror and rapture

she awoke from her dreaming, to know that love was not what she had imagined, a mélange of reverent caresses, petals of blush roses, veils of tender mystery, and mild moonshine generally. She realized, dimly, that love could be more bitter than the salt sea, sharper than swords; and that when one has drunk its bitterness and felt its pain, no sweetness nor softness can ever satisfy one again.

Mr. Banks was waiting for them at the Rectory, and had only to step out of the parlour a moment to put on his surplice and summon Mrs. Banks, who had not been told in advance of what might take place, together with Miss Battie and Miss Messie Hall, who had happened in to spend the afternoon with her. Then he said in a business-like way: "If you'll just stand here by the piano-lamp, please. Now, Dr. Bellamy—Miss Trent—if you are ready—"

His voice changed from its week-day to its Sunday tones, as he addressed George and Marigold, his wife, the Misses Hall, and the cook, who had wandered in to say the halibut for dinner had not come, and, finding herself at a wedding, lingered spell-bound.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony."

Marigold's eyes rested on the blue and mustard silk of the lampshade; and on "Mother Machree", open on the piano. Some one was sniffing behind her, and Mr. Banks was making his voice sound resonant, and full of expression. It did not feel like being married; it was more like acting charades, with Mrs. Banks and Miss Messie and Miss Battie and the cook looking on and trying to guess the word, except that her knees were trembling so.

Mr. Banks' voice was trembling, too, like a whistle with water in it. People were apt to speak with admiration of the "feeling" he threw into his services.

"George, wilt thou have this Woman to thy wedded wife—"

Suddenly she felt as if she were going to faint; the lampshade blurred in a coloured mist; she was shaking all over, she could no longer hear what Mr. Banks was saying. She turned her head, terrified, and met George's eyes smiling into hers, steady and sure, and heard his voice, not trying to have the right expression, but as natural as when he told her not to eat all the bacon sandwiches at lunch.

"I George take thee Marigold to my wedded Wife, to have and to hold—to love and to cherish—"

It was all right. She was safe; she was with him. The mists cleared away, and she stopped trembling. She felt the slight chill of the ring encircling her

finger. There was no one else in the world but George and Marigold, forever.

“Allow me to be the first to congratulate you, Dr. and Mrs. Bellamy!” said Mr. Banks, hastily putting on his cordial, man-of-the-world voice. “I wish you both every possible joy!”

Mrs. Banks said in agitated tones that perhaps they would have a glass of raspberry vinegar—she and the Misses Hall had just been on the point of having some, when Mr. Banks summoned them. “I know it’s good, Mrs. Bellamy—Mrs. Bellamy! Does that sound odd to you?—because I make it myself from a receipt of my grandmother’s, and Mr. Banks is very fond of it, so I always put up quite a lot, but last year raspberries were so high—well, we must all drink the health of the bride, I’m sure, and perhaps a slice of cake, very plain, I’m afraid—if I’d only known ahead! But at least it’s fresh. Arthur, dear, Dr. and Mrs. Bellamy are going to join us in a glass of raspberry vinegar.”

She hurried to the kitchen, shooing the dazzled cook before her, while Miss Battie and Miss Messie wrung their small red noses with their handkerchiefs, and tried to keep their fascinated eyes off Marigold’s frock, surely an odd one for a bride.

“Think of you being married, George!” Miss Battie said, with a sentimental sniff. “I do declare, it seems only yesterday that you were a little tiny boy coming in to try to teach the parrot to sing

‘Once in Royal David’s City’! Oh, dear, how serious you were about it! You used to like our molasses cookies, too, do you remember?”

“You bet I do, Miss Mattie, the best molasses cookies that ever were baked. You must tell Marigold how to make them. And I’ll never forget how crazy I was about your—what was its name? Something-or-other, or Wheel of Life, with pictures hopping around inside when you turned the handle—the lady and gentleman waltzing, and the horse jumping over the hurdle.”

“Sister! Only think! George remembers our old Zoetrope! Why you couldn’t have been more than five years old, for we lost it when the house on Willow Street burned down, and that was over thirty years ago!” Eagerly the two old women asked their questions.

“And do you remember——?”

“And do you remember——?”

Mr. Banks, meanwhile, engaged Marigold in easy chat on the subject of Italy and the Italians (led up to by the Amalfi Monk, in sepia, hanging over the sectional bookcases) until, after the raspberry vinegar and the good plain cake, they were free to go.

“Lord, darling! I can’t say anything! I think I’m going to bust!” said George, as they turned out of the Rectory drive. “You don’t hate me for rushing you off your feet that way, Marigold——? Oh, my gosh, Ducky, we’re going to have fun!”

"I ought to stop and tell the maids I won't be home to supper—that is, if you're expecting me?"

"I wasn't, but never mind. I'll try to bear it. Oh, Marigold! You don't mind my shouting, do you? Oh, Marigold! If I don't, I'll blow up into two billion small pieces—oh, MARIGOLD!"

They stopped at Mrs. Boynton's house, and she ran up to the forget-me-not room, and gathered a few things together; the rest could be sent for later. At Donald's door she paused a moment; there were tears in her eyes, there was love in her heart as she said good-by.

Then down to George who waited; to George who was the beginning and the end, who burned within her like a clear flame. Just to see his hand on the wheel—to put out a finger and touch his coat—to meet the look in his eyes—

He swung the motor in between the pine-trees, black against a sweep of sky feathered with small pink clouds. Before them, from open door and windows, streamed the lights of home.

PART III: MRS. BELLAMY'S HOUSE

PART III: *Mrs. Bellamy's House*

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. BOYNTON, MRS. CAMPBELL, MRS. MEARS, THE
MISSES HALL, MRS. MARSHALL, MRS. MASON,
MISS PATTERSON, AND MISS QUACKENBUSH
GIVE THEIR OPINIONS

COUSIN LOU CAMPBELL had meant to have creamed oysters for supper, as Cousin Eva Boynton was particularly fond of them, but her mother, Mrs. Mears, had fortunately remembered that there was no R in the month of May, so she ordered sweetbreads instead. The three ladies and Cousin Edwin Campbell, Cousin Lou's husband, were helping themselves to these, when the telephone rang, and Cousin Edwin, answering it, announced a long distance call for Mrs. Boynton.

“Oh, mercy! I hope no one's dead!” said Mrs. Mears.

“Mother! You go and answer, Cousin Eva, and I'll send out your plate to keep warm.”

“Oh, who can it be?” asked Mrs. Boynton. “I oughtn't to have left home—I had a sort of feeling —thank you, Cousin Ed. Don't wait for me, go

right on with your supper." In spite of her agitation, she remembered to put on her Society-voice as she said into the telephone: "Yes? Mrs. Boynton speaking."

"Well, Ed, what's the news in the papers tonight?" asked Cousin Lou, politely trying not to listen to Cousin Eva's conversation. But Mrs. Mears, that unaffected woman, wanted to hear, and said so. "Hush, Lou," she urged. "I can't hear a word Eva's saying, when you talk to Ed."

Eva was saying: "Pardon? I can't quite get the name? Oh." Her voice grew notably less a Society-voice. It shed some of its sweetness, and its suggestion of Southern accent. "Oh, yes, yes, I understand, Dr. Bellamy. Yes, Doctor?"

"Some one's sick," said Mrs. Mears. "I heard her say Doctor."

"Ssh, Mother. Peas, Ed?"

"I don't quite get that, Dr. Bellamy. I think we must have a poor connection, there seems to be a sort of buzzing and snapping—if you'd just repeat that——?"

"Tell Central to give you a better connection," called Mrs. Mears. "She can if she's a mind to."

"What, Aunt Anna? I wasn't speaking to you, Dr. Bellamy, I was—I can hear you better now—yes—excuse me, Doctor, but I think if you would try speaking with your mouth a little nearer the phone——"

“Click that little side thing up and down,” advised Cousin Lou, who had given up trying to be polite.

“What, Cousin Lou? Oh, yes, Doctor, yes, what *about* Marigold?”

George, at the other end of the wire, was saying over and over again:

“I married Marigold this afternoon,” varying it with: “Marigold married me.”

“I can hear Marigold Marigold,” said Mrs. Boynton with asperity. “Marigold Marigold this afternoon, but what *happened* to her?”

“Is it bad news?” shouted Mrs. Mears.

“What, Aunt Anna? No—I don’t know—he just keeps saying Marigold Marigold——”

George, at his end, rolled frenzied eyes at Marigold, who sat on his desk. “How’s she taking it?” she whispered anxiously.

“I think the shock’s turned her brain—she keeps calling me Aunt Anna. Mrs. Boynton, Marigold and I were married this afternoon—Dr. Banks married us.”

“It’s buzzing so I couldn’t hear a word but bank,” Mrs. Boynton reported to her fascinated relatives.

“Maybe Marigold’s robbed the bank,” suggested Mrs. Mears.

“Marigold — and — I—were—married—this—afternoon,” George repeated.

“Yes, Doctor, I get it all but what it was Marigold *did*,” and: “Tell her I *hope* she doesn’t mind *too* much, and I’m dreadfully grateful for all she’s done for me, and *please* to forgive me,” said Mrs. Boynton and Marigold simultaneously, one into one ear, one into the other.

“Oh, shut up!” cried George! “No, not you, Mrs. Boynton—I say not *you*. If you’d *only* clear out, darling—oh, Lord, now she thinks I’ve called her darling——!”

After five more feverish minutes he hung up the telephone and mopped his forehead.

“Did she mind *very* much?” asked Marigold.

“I haven’t the faintest idea whether she knows what’s happened or not—we were both delirious for the last few hours; she kept screaming ‘Aunt Anna’ at me, and something about buzzing and snapping—Aunt Anna was buzzing and snapping——”

“And you kept screaming ‘Shut up, darling,’ at her——”

“Lord, Marigold, if I’d known the trouble it was going to be, I’d never have married you—you don’t begin to be worth it. Come and kiss me——”

But Mrs. Boynton had understood at last.

“Well, was it bad news?” questioned Mrs. Mears, still hopeful.

“Could you finally understand him?” asked

Cousin Lou. ("Bring back Mrs. Boynton's plate, now, Irma.")

Mrs. Boynton's face was deep pink. She sat down and took a drink of water, flapping an agitated hand to show that she was speechless with emotion.

"Is any one dead?" pursued Mrs. Mears.

Mrs. Boynton shook her head and clutched at her throat.

"Better get her a glass of sherry, Ed," advised Cousin Lou, fanning Mrs. Boynton with her napkin.

Mrs. Mears followed her son-in-law from the room to suggest that the cooking-sherry would answer the purpose admirably: it seemed a shame to use the other when Eva was obviously in no frame of mind to appreciate it. But she might have spared herself the trouble, for she found that this sensible idea had occurred to Mr. Campbell as well as to herself.

Somewhat revived by the sherry, Mrs. Boynton said:

"The most awful thing has happened—do you remember my telling you about that Dr. Bellamy at home? The one I never liked? Well, Marigold has taken advantage of my being away to go and get *married* to him!"

"For pity's sake!"

"After all you've done for her!"

"I had a feeling when I left home ~~this~~ morning that something awful was going to happen—a sort

of premonition. Don't you remember, I told you so when I first got here, Aunt Anna?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Mears tactlessly.

"Well, I did, anyway—I *knew* there was going to be some terrible trouble. I've had those feelings before, and they always mean something—but to think that the minute my back was turned——"

"Well, that's gratitude for you," said Cousin Edwin: "that's what I always say; the more you do for any one, the less you need expect."

"She might just as well have stabbed me in the back!" moaned Mrs. Boynton. "After the comforts and love I've lavished on her, to turn round and do this——!"

"I should think you'd be pleased, Eva," Mrs. Mears said. "Don't you recollect telling Lou and me what a tax it was having some one in the house all the time, using the spare room and all, and how you just kept her because she hadn't any one of her own? You remember, Lou, how we felt so sorry for Eva, after she told us how tied down she was on account of Marigold? I should think you'd be just delighted, Eva."

"Oh, Aunt Anna, you don't understand. To think she was just waiting until my back was turned—and my worrying so because I was afraid she'd be lonely while I was away—*lonely—Hmp!*"

"It's *terrible*, dear. Have another helping of sweetbreads? Sure you won't? Then you may

change the plates, Irma. How long do you suppose they've had this planned, Cousin Eva?"

"Goodness knows—he *says* she didn't know ahead, and he just made her this afternoon—at least, that's what I think he said, but it was buzzing and snapping and sort of *quacking* so—"

"D'you suppose there was any reason they *had* to get married so quick?" suggested Mrs. Mears indelicately.

"*Mercy*, Mother! Peach or vanilla ice-cream, Cousin Eva?"

"It's too bad to waste this good supper on me, Cousin Lou, I'm so upset I might as well be eating sawdust—just a little of both, please. You know I wrote you how he wanted her to marry him last fall, but, goodness, I thought they'd gotten over that, months ago. He's been away. I can't seem to take it in, somehow."

"Well, you never can tell what's going to happen next," observed Mr. Campbell profoundly. "When that telephone rang, who'd have thought all the excitement it was going to make? (I'd like another helping of cream, Lou.) I just thought it was one of Mother Mears' best beaux calling her up, as per usual."

"Yes, or one of your sick friends asking you to sit with him this evening," Mrs. Mears replied with spirit; and added:

"You girls better hurry if you're going to that entertainment."

"Oh, Aunt Anna! I don't know whether I *can*! I feel upset clear through."

"Oh, yes, Cousin Eva, it would do you good, take your mind off this, and it isn't as if it was just some light foolish show, or the movies, but it's something so really worth while——"

"After all, nobody's dead," Mrs. Mears added.

"Donald's dead," said his mother and burst into tears.

"Excuse me—got to do something," murmured Mr. Campbell in an embarrassed voice and tiptoed from the room.

"Donald's dead, but who cares? Nobody, nobody! Every one's forgotten you, my darling, but I don't forget—I'm all just one great dragging ache for you—here—here——!" She beat her breast. "Donny! Donny! Mother remembers!"

"Get the smelling salts, Lou," urged Mrs. Mears. "Here, Eva, you drink this water."

Mrs. Boynton's teeth clicked on the rim of the tumbler. "I can't breathe! My heart aches so, I can't breathe—Donald!"

"There, there, dearie, don't take it so hard. You were always simply perfect to Donald—you certainly never can reproach yourself—and you know you never thought she was the right girl for him, from the very start."

"No, I never did. She never really appreciated him—and sometimes I've thought that Donald realized that she wasn't all that she seemed at first—he never *said* anything, but a mother *feels* those things—but of course Son had such high ideals, he'd feel bound to stick to his bargain—he was always such a regular Sir Galahad——"

"A very *parfait* gentil knight," murmured Cousin Lou genteelly.

These thoughts of Marigold's unworthiness so cheered Mrs. Boynton that, after a liberal application of hot water and talcum powder to her face, she decided that it would be a shame to waste the tickets for the musicale, and, as long as Aunt Anna firmly refused to go, she must make an effort. So she wound her flowered scarf about her head, put on her black silk coat, and, gathering up her white gloves and her Dresden silk bag with a mirror in the bottom, was ready to join Cousin Lou in the taxi-cab that shuddered and throbbed before the door.

During the musicale, she whispered:

"Cousin Lou! In a way, this gives Donald back to me more than anything else could, doesn't it? I think the only thing to do will be to be perfectly pleasant to them, but dignified, don't you?"

The young ladies were in the midst of singing about being off with the Raggie-Taggle Gypsies, Oh; and several members of the audience turned

in their seats and looked coldly at Mrs. Boynton, but she continued to whisper.

“If they only had come to me, perfectly frankly—but there’s always something not quite nice about a sudden marriage like this, don’t you think so? I’m afraid people will talk.”

Her fears were justified. People did talk. The town buzzed like a bee-hive. Never in their lives had Miss Battie and Miss Messie Hall, the wedding-guests, been invited out to tea so often. They told their story a hundred times; how they had been sitting on the side porch with Mrs. Banks, never thinking a thing in the world, but crocheting bedroom slippers for the next Church fair, and Mrs. Banks had just said: “I’m going to slip in and get some raspberry vinegar, it’s such a warm day for May,” when Mr. Banks had appeared at the door to say:

“Will you come into the parlour, Emma, and you, too, Miss Mattie and Miss Bessie? Dr. Bellamy and Miss Trent have come to be married.”

“You could have knocked us over with a feather,” said Miss Messie. “We’ve known George Bellamy ever since he was born, you know.”

“Oh, Sister, *much* longer than that! Why, we knew his father when he was a boy!”

“So we went in, and there was dear George in his old riding-clothes——”

“But looking so handsome!” put in Miss Battie sentimentally.

“Oh, Sister, I wouldn’t call George *handsome*—nice-looking, but never *handsome*—”

Urged to continue their story, they reported that the bride had worn a gingham frock that would have been the better for a trip to the wash-tub, but had looked very sweet; that she had seemed nervous at first, and that her voice had trembled as she made the responses; but that later she had grown quite calm and cheerful, and had eaten all of a large slice of cake; that Mr. Banks had read the service with the most *wonderful* expression; and that George had stepped on a piece of cake and ground it into the parlour rug.

“And the look they gave each other—don’t forget that, Sister,” said Miss Battie, with tears in her old eyes.

Mrs. Marshall rushed to see Mrs. Boynton on her return from Cousin Lou Campbell’s. She had a great deal to say, and was going to be sure that no one else had a chance to say it first.

“Of course, Eva, you can’t blame people for talking,” she said. “Or at least, you can blame them all day, and all night too, for that matter, but you can’t stop them. People are bound to talk about a sudden marriage like this, and it’s really funny the way every one seems to think *I* must be in the know, just because I’m so intimate with you,

and because of Don and Dorothy, I suppose. Any-way, I tell them all that of *course* there wasn't any-thing wrong about it—there wasn't, was there? No, of course not, I never thought for a moment there was—but one hears such queer things. Some people are saying she seemed sort of drugged—I think it was the Banks' cook told someone—and of course, while I don't believe a word of it, being a doctor he *would* know all about how to do such things, *wouldn't* he? I'll never forget how sort of cold and unsympathetic he seemed when Junior and little Sister were born—the sort of man who'd have his own way, no matter what. And then it seemed a *little* funny for a minister to have wine just flowing at a wedding at his own house."

"It was raspberry vinegar," said Mrs. Boynton honestly.

"*Was* it? Well—of course, sometimes things get twisted—but I heard—well, no matter. But they went past Mrs. Mason's on the way home, and she was in her front yard, and she said he was just *yelling*—"

"He did sound very thick when he phoned me that evening; I could hardly make out a word he said."

"Well, I only hope for her sake he doesn't do it as a regular thing. And then, Mrs. Banks didn't know a *thing* about what was going to happen—oh, mercy, no!—but all the same she had a wedding-

cake all ready, and one's so apt to bake a wedding-cake just by *accident*. Looks to me as if Mr. Banks must have gotten a pret-ty good fee! Of course, I don't mean he was *bribed*——”

At the hospital the nurses were in a twitter of excitement. Miss Quackenbush thought it was the sweetest thing that had ever happened; Miss Patterson thought they must both be crazy.

All of George and Marigold's world seethed and bubbled, like a kettle on the boil.

They two sat one evening in basket chairs on the lawn under the pear-tree, having their coffee. Coco, restored to his mistress, lay at their feet, cocking an eye at the robins that hopped about the lawn tugging at worms. The western sky was yellow, but already faint stars glimmered through the pine-trees.

“George,” said Marigold, “I don't care a bit, but it does seem queer that in all this world you're just *you*, biff, like that, and I'm just *me*—or is it *I*? Which is it? *I*? *Me*? ”

“Mmm,” said George, who was reading the sporting page.

“*Hi!*”

“What's the matter?”

“I'm talking to you! I said, wasn't it queer that you were you, without any one belonging to you——”

“But you.”

“But me, and I'm I without any one belonging to

me but you, and there isn't one single soul in all the rest of the world, except Mrs. Boynton, in a way, I suppose, who's the least little bit interested in the astonishing wonderful marvellous unbelievable fact of our having married each other?"

CHAPTER XVII

ECSTASY

GEORGE BELLAMY took Marigold to a little village by the sea. A mile from the single street of shops and small white houses stood their cottage, so tiny that Marigold felt as though some giant child might at any moment open the whole front wall, and rearrange them and their little chairs and dishes.

Behind them lay the pine woods, where the air was murmurous all day with the wind in the branches; and where the sun fell in long yellow shafts through the straight rosy trunks. From their door a path led down steep steps of rock to a half-moon of beach, covered with smooth pebbles and tiny shells, white, chocolate, rose, and mauve, washed by the waves. The beach was bounded on one side by the ocean, and on the others by the curve of the little cliff that shut it off from the world, and that was hung from top to bottom with harebells until it looked like a shimmering waterfall of divinest blue.

To George and Marigold the summer was a golden miracle. Giving to each other the passion and peace

of love, they were in perfect harmony, body and mind and soul.

Standing in Mr. Peter's little shop in the village, surrounded by potted meats and crab-nets, bathing caps, and glass jars of striped sweets, while flies buzzed on a sheet of sticky paper, and Mr. Peters showed them the seagull he had stuffed, they looked at each other suddenly, drowning in love. Waiting for their letters, buying lobsters from old Mr. Lane, or eggs from his wife, their eyes would meet, their hearts would cry to each other: "You and I! You and I!"

They had been bathing one day for most of the afternoon, going into the crystal water, then coming out to lie in the sun. George swam far out, with long strong strokes, the foam hissing against his body, and then raced back to Marigold, who reclined against a rock, admiring the whiteness of her feet through the green water, and idly kicking at the sea-weed that floated in swirls of liquid colour.

"Gosh, but I'm a grand swimmer!" he announced boastfully. "Hope you were looking at me then, old dear! Come out and have a sun-bath." They lay together on a steamer rug that he had spread over the pebbles, George smoking, Marigold with one cheek bulging with a lemon bullseye. Seagulls wheeled high above them, crying mournfully, dazzling of white in the boundless blue, or flew so

close above the water that their breasts were stained with the green reflection.

George held a spray of harebells over Marigold's face. "Just the colour of your eyes, lovey-dovey," he remarked.

"Oh, George, you've said that about every blue thing you've seen since we've been married; sky, sea, harebells, blueberries, Mr. Lane's overalls, Mrs. Lane's nose that frosty morning——"

"Garn—I haven't. I wish you could see the shadows these make on your face, little bells of shadow all over it."

"Sounds like the tattooed man," said Marigold. Her bullseye suddenly caved in with a crash and she reached for another.

"See how they've faded," he said presently, putting down the drooping spray of flowers that stuck together like bits of wet crumpled purple silk. "And yet if you put them in water they'd freshen and straighten; you know the way they stiffen delicately, and the flowers open again. They're like you, darling. This is the way you were the first time I saw you—limp and crumpled and all in, I thought——"

"*Did* you think so, George?"

"Yes, I did, and look at you now!"

"Have I stiffened delicately?"

"Delicately's hardly the word, young one—you're wonderful! Strong as a horse, and thank the Lord you're getting fat."

"Oh, George, what a *mean* thing to say!" she wailed. "A *fat* harebell!"

He pulled her closer to him and kissed her.

"Happy, my darling?"

"I *am* not! After being called a fat harebell! It's left me feeling very feak and weeble. Besides, if I told you I was, you'd give me a scientific lecture about its only being a form of mumps or measles or something, the way you told me ecstasy was only a form of catalepsy." She rolled into the curve of his arm like a sleepy child.

"Oof! But I love you!" he said. "You and I! I don't give a damn for anybody else. I only care about what you and I—what we—think and feel and do. This little pig says 'We, we'!"

"So does this one," she said. Suddenly she sat up. "George, that's the difference between us! I really feel that way, I really don't care about other people, just about *us*. But you do care terribly. You open your heart to the world. You love it here, you love me, but you'd *die* if you had it steadily. You can't just take, you have to be giving. Oh, if I *see* trouble, I'm sorry. I'm dreadfully uncomfortable, and I try to do something—but here, do I care whether millions of people are hungry, or sick, or bad? I know where to find maiden-hair ferns in the woods, and the tall purple-spotted toadstools—I know where pink shells are, on the beach. What do I care for the rest of humanity? I plaster maiden-

hair over my eyes, and put the shells over my ears——”

“Careful what you do with the purple spotted toadstools,” George murmured, “poisonous, you know.” But she paid no attention to him.

“I make myself blind and deaf, deliberately. I *won’t* think; it’s too uncomfortable. I twist and turn and evade. I think I can do without people because I have depths within myself—*depths!* I’m as shallow and brittle as a sheet of ice on a mud-puddle! I’m as hard and immature as a green apple that’s dropped off the tree. And you! When I think of how you’re spending your life—just pouring it out for the people at the hospital—it makes me so ashamed. When I want to do something real with my life, which is about once every six months, what do I do? Muddle, muddle, muddle round inside my head. I can’t reach hungry children in Russia, and it seems too utterly futile to bother about planting geraniums in the Depot Park, and what is there in between? But you don’t worry about changing the world—you cure the sick Maloney baby and get old Jim Tarr a job sweeping out the library—you go ahead and *do* something.”

“My darling child, what a stirring speech! Of course not in the least prejudiced.”

“George, I’m dreadfully in earnest. Will you help me to make it worth while, my having been born? I want to be a help to you; you don’t know

how it makes me feel, knowing that any one of those nurses I used to be so sweet and patronizing to, really is worth more to you than I am. Will you give me definite hard work to do for you?"

"I might find you something to do if you really wanted it, Marigold, but it wouldn't be romantic or picturesque."

"Oh, I don't *want* to smooth fevered brows, or any pretty little thing like that! I want hard work."

"I thought you were the girl who put ferns over her eyes and didn't care about humanity."

"I don't know *what* girl I am," she answered honestly. "I can talk myself or read myself into being *any* girl. I start out one thing, and by the time I'm through talking, I've changed into an entirely different thing, and I don't even know when it happened. Just now I'm so crazy about you, I want to be as like you as I can, but I don't know what I am, really."

"I know what you are to me. I was as dried-up as as a kippered herring, with dust an inch thick all over me, when I found you, Marigold. Darling, promise you'll open my eyes when they become fast closed to the things you see so clearly—my little blessed one."

"The things I see clearly? Maiden-hair ferns——?"

She smiled into his eyes, catching her breath, as

he gave her the look she loved, smiling and profound.

“Call it whatever you like, maiden-hair ferns, or God Almighty. Come on, one more swim. It’s getting cold.”

His words sang in her heart; and as they climbed dripping up the stone steps together, she said, beginning her beautiful life-work of keeping George’s eyes open:

“Look at the sunset, all that soft luminous pearly pink, and the little curled feathers of mauve; isn’t it gentle, George? Isn’t it *gentle*? ”

“Awfully gentle; wouldn’t alarm a flea,” George agreed amiably. “Let’s make griddle cakes for supper, shall we, Marigold? ”

September came, too soon. In the daytime everything was as bright and glistening as wet cakes of paint in a colour-box. In the chilly evenings fog rolled in from the sea, and their fire roared up the chimney.

They came in together towards dark on their last day there. They had walked for miles, and said good-bye to all their secret places. Rain drummed on the roof, shutting them off from the world.

“You’ve got rain in your hair, ducky,” George said. “Little drops all over, that make it curl up like sixty, and your cheeks are as red as I don’t know what.”

“Boiled beets?” suggested Marigold, hoping not.

“Scarlet silk. You like that better, don’t you?”

He lay back in his deep chair, his muddy boots stretched to the blaze; and Marigold sat on the edge of the table, looking like a child with her short skirt and little woolly jacket. They were drinking tea and eating buttered toast.

“I’m butter from head to foot,” she said. “I feel like a greased pig. I’ve butter on my nose, and butter on my chin, butter everywhere without and everywhere within.”

“So’ve I,” said George. “Butter on my fingers, butter on my snout, butter everywhere within and everywhere without. That’s what I call buttered toast, Ma’am, big honest gobs of butter, no refined little scrape. I’m developing you into a grand cook, Marigold.”

“Speaking of cooks——”

“I know. Also speaking of housemaids, and housekeeping, and going back to work, and curious callers coming to look at the bride. It’s going to be a far cry from seagulls and pine-trees, Marigold. Getting frightened?”

“Never, about anything, as long as I’m with you! And we’ll keep the seagulls and the pine-trees in our hearts——”

“We will that! And the wind and the waves. We’ll keep the ocean in our hearts, young one, and

when we don't like things, we'll throw them into it, won't we?"

"Oh, I do *depend* on you so! You never fail me. I'll always try to do what you want me to, George," she cried emotionally.

"A very proper sentiment. If you want a pleasant day, Let your husband have his way. Old Adage."

"Well, I like that! When I was feeling so sort of thrilled and holy about you—hmp! If you want a happy life, Always try to please your wife. Rustic Proverb!"

He pulled her into the big chair with him, kissing her face and hair. With his lips on her cheek, he said:

"We won't forget the nights we've lain safe and warm, when the wind blew so that you were afraid it would blow off the roof—little goose—and carry it out to sea."

"Oh, I did think it would go sailing off, and that we'd have a shower of stars about us! It *has* been a shower of stars, this time together, George. Can we keep like this? I mean, not settle down and get dull and drab and used to each other? Can we? Think of the people in restaurants, sitting and never saying a word to each other, just looking so bored, and you know right off that they're married. After awhile, it doesn't seem to matter a bit to any one *who* they're married to, as long as

they're used to each other. Will we get to the point where you'll say: 'You should speak to the butcher about this beefsteak, my dear,' and after fifteen minutes I'll come back with something exciting like, 'Did you have a hard day, George?' or 'The man came to look at the kitchen boiler'? *Promise* me that we won't get that way! Other people do start in like us, I suppose, and they do drift apart. Each one of them goes on thinking his own thoughts, never listening to the other *really*, separate, lonely—promise me that we won't change!"

"I can't promise you that, Marigold. But we really love each other."

"Then we'll be happy!"

"Happiness doesn't matter much. There's only one thing that matters, and that is that we should be true to each other. I don't mean faithful. I mean we mustn't pretend or smooth over, just to make things pleasant for the moment. There's something real in you—in me—in the feeling we have for each other; we must be true to that. My own dear girl, I'm saying it so badly. I'm bobbing for words the way you bob for Hallowe'en apples. D'you know what I mean at all? It'll be hard as the devil sometimes, but that doesn't matter. We must go straight through anything, pain, grief, death, for truth. Sometimes we'll have to hurt each other. That's what frightens me, darling. I know

your little tender heart, and how you can't bear to have any one suffer. I'm afraid of your keeping things from me if you thought they'd make me unhappy! Never pretend to me, Marigold, never! You must not."

For a moment a curtain lifted, and they looked, not moving, not breathing, each into the other's eyes, conquering for one instant life's long isolation.

CHAPTER XVIII

DINNER AT MISS ARCHIBALD'S

GEORGE brought Marigold back to a different world from Mrs. Boynton's, and watched her grow bright and glowing in the sympathetic atmosphere.

"I feel like a Japanese water-flower dropped into a finger-bowl," she told him. "You know those little things that stay all tight and dull until you put them into water, and then they spread open and show all sorts of colours. And I do like your friends, George—they really are grand to show off to!"

"There's a new one next door that you can practice on," said George. "Hugo Curry's back from Paris. His aunt is back from somewhere, too, to Hugo's fury."

"Will I like him?" asked Marigold, ignoring the aunt.

"I don't know—yes, I think so—I hope so. I've known him since he was a kid, although he was in Paris most of the time. But they used to come here every now and then—Mr. Curry all business, and Mrs. all clothes and melting glances and dulcet

tones—not for her own family, though. Hugo was always having tutors, and she was always having affairs with them. Then he had an older sister named Blanche, who was married to a title, and was awfully unhappy, poor little kid. She had a baby, and I remember Hugo telling me that she and it both cried all the time, so that it was no fun being with her any more. Then when he was thirteen his mother ran off with a young Italian, and there was the devil to pay."

It was several days before Marigold saw her neighbors. But, grubbing among the tall pale pansies in the shade of the hedge, one hot September afternoon, she heard a crackling above her and, looking up, saw a head—a beaming purple face beaded with moisture, with wisps of grey hair spraying out from under an old sun-helmet. Framed in cedar branches, it seemed as disembodied as the Cheshire Cat.

"Best dig 'em all up," the head advised. "They'll never amount to anything there. Your iris needs thinning. You'd better pull up that aconitum, my dogs may come in and eat it, and it's deadly poison."

Marigold, with a feeling that her garden was being uprooted before her eyes, gazed speechlessly at the face.

"You're the bride, I suppose. I'm your next-door-neighbor. My name is Daisy Archibald, but

my nom-de-plume—I write, by the way,—is John Strong."

"Oh, *yes—!*" began Marigold, but Miss Archibald interrupted:

"Don't pretend you've heard of me, for you haven't. Not caring a whoop for the public, the natural consequence is that the publishers don't care a whoop for me. However, I'm at work on one now—well, we'll see. The trouble is, I write reality, and people can't go that, you know. If I find you interesting, I may put you in one of my novels, but I make no promises; you look rather pink and white. Crawl through the hedge, and I'll show you my garden, if you like—here's a place."

Marigold crawled through, and found herself behind the lodge of the big estate next door. There were basket chairs under a mulberry tree, and two fat old spaniels slept in the sunshine; the shaven lawn swept away towards the great house, and through the trees Marigold caught glimpses of beds glowing with autumn flowers; but the borders near the lodge were sparsely filled, and generally rather greenish-brown in effect.

"D'you know my nephew, Hugo Curry?" asked Miss Archibald. "That's his house—it annoys him frightfully that I won't live in it. He's in Paris most of the time—happens to be here just now. I won't live there because I'm a Socialist, and it's too large and luxurious, so I make Hugo let me have

the lodge, to lead the simple life in; that's why I wear overalls and a smock. What d'you think of my garden?"

Marigold uttered polite insincerities, but they were lost in the torrent of Miss Archibald's speech.

"You see, this border is a mass of yellows—from cream to deepest orange—at least, it isn't just now, but if you only had seen it a couple of weeks ago! I planted for succession, but Rover and Fido will get in and roll." She indicated the dreaming spaniels. "This bed would have been exquisite, pink and mauve—callistephus hortensis—but the aster-beetles came; that's why I put in the ashes; the dahlias were wonderful until the big wind last week, that blew mine all over; you really should have seen the garden then, or a few weeks from now, when the anthemias tinctoria comes on. I wish you could have seen my garden in England. I had a little place there, Crow Clump, its name was. Roses like cabbages, and the roof one sheet of colour with the antirrhinums—there was a garden that *was* a garden!"

"What's this," asked Marigold, indicating a meager clump of dark leaves.

"That? That's *Helleborus niger*—you know, Christmas rose; Rover dug a place for a bone under it and it hasn't been quite the same since. How d'you like my dogs' names, by the way? It's always so difficult to decide which way to be clever when

you're naming animals, don't you think? I mean, whether to name them frightfully original things, or frightfully obvious ones, like Dobbin for a horse, and Dicky for a bird. As for falling back on the Old Testament, *that* I call plain cowardice."

She lowered herself ponderously into a creaking chair, and stuck a cigarette into the corner of her large mouth. "I'm practicing on a pipe in private," she confided. "But I'm not quite perfect at it yet. I smoke it perfectly, of course, but I have a feeling that I still look a trifle self-conscious. Have a cigarette? But I advise you not to. Your nose is too short to make it becoming. You're really very pretty, aren't you? It must give one's face quite an odd feeling to look as pretty as yours does. If I'd had your looks *and* my brains, I'd have been either a King's mistress or in the gutter by now. How do you like your husband?"

"Very much, thank you," Marigold answered, feeling as if she were dreaming.

"He may go into my book; he's a curious specimen," said Miss Archibald, as if George were a sea-horse or a bower-bird. "I'm calling it 'Withered Apples'—good name, might mean anything. Intriguing. I like the dedication, rather. 'To You—if you still remember.' Pretty good, eh? Poignant. To you with a capital Y dash if you still remember. Every man I ever knew will buy it, thinking it's meant for him. There's my nephew riding

in. Yoo-hoo! Hugo! He won't answer, because he disapproves of shouting, and I keep on shouting because I disapprove of his not answering. Hello, he is stopping—he must have seen you."

Marigold watched Hugo Curry dismount and walk across the lawn to them; he was short and slight, with a white face and black hair; he looked like some smoothly finished portrait painted in the sixties, and the grave politeness with which he bent over her rather earthy hand was as old-world and remote as his appearance. His voice had a sighing, singing quality; she understood why it caused his aunt to raise hers, already loud and hearty, to the pitch one might use in hailing a distant ferry, as she suggested jovially that they should all have a glass of wine.

"I think I've tumblers enough to go round if you don't mind using the tooth-brush mug, Hugo, and I have some fresh cracknels, too. They're really pretzels, but I call them cracknels because that sounds so quaint and medieval," she said.

"Aunt, I'm filled with apprehension; if it's that dandelion wine you made, I'd rather die than drink another glass of it. If you'll come up to the house, I'll give you a decent drink."

"All right," said his aunt, with the greatest good-nature. "That wine *is* rather nasty; besides, it's apt to explode when you touch the bottle. Come on!" She thrust her arm affectionately through

Marigold's, and they strolled up the avenue to the shady verandah of the big house, where a footman brought them things to eat and drink.

"Disgusting, the way you live, Hugo!" Miss Archibald said rather thickly through a mouth full of caviare sandwich, as she helped herself to whisky and soda. "Never mind, you'll be glad of a cracknel and a tooth-mug of my dandelion wine when the Revolution comes—and it's coming fast, my dear. We thinkers are working for it, without haste, without rest, bind the motto to thy breast—where's the man? I could do with one of those anchovy things." Reaching for sandwiches, she managed with a sweep of her arm to break several bud-laden stalks from the flowering plants in an old Italian urn, but had the presence of mind to exclaim, as she gathered them up:

"Poor little buds—too, too tired to bloom!"

"What wonderful gold-fish you have in your pool," Marigold said hastily to Hugo, trying to dispel the slight frown that appeared on his forehead as he watched his aunt, who, having broken his buds, was now splashing soda indiscriminately into her glass and onto a heap of sea-green cushions that lay on the red tiles of the verandah floor. Her mild remark attracted Miss Archibald's attention. She took a long look at Marigold through pince-nez attached to a broad black ribbon.

"What d'you think of her, Hugo?" she inquired,

as if Marigold were stuffed and in a glass case. "Isn't she young and pretty, what? You'd think with that pink and white face she'd have a mind like Bavarian sponge, but not at all! Quite intelligent, I find! Lovely colour, eh? Too bright at present, as we're both looking at her, so let's look away and change the subject. Why don't you all come to dinner with me on Monday—you can bring your husband, and Hugo can bring his cook, if he minds a meal out of tins. I sent my own cook packing—the foaming idiot! She boiled twelve Indian Chiefs—boiled and creamed them and sent them in for my supper."

"She boiled *what*?"

"A dozen Indian Chiefs—you know, those wonderful tulips, mahogany-coloured and purple, perfectly huge and frightfully expensive. The bulbs cost three dollars apiece, and she found them in a basket and thought they were onions."

"What's Mr. Curry like?" Marigold asked George that evening after dinner.

"Oh, all right. Have I had a second cup of coffee yet?"

"Not yet. What a vivid description—'all right!'"

"Tell me what you thought of him."

"I couldn't *stand* him!" she said, dropping sugar into George's cup with an emphatic splash. "He

was so refined and exquisite, murmuring about how to make moss grow on garden paths, and white peacocks in the moonlight, and Irish poetry; he made me want to *bellow*! I never felt so like being rough and tough in my life! I wanted to talk about prize-fights and pig-raising—I wanted to walk like Charlie Chaplin—and that sensitive mouth twitching at the corners—oo! George, you can't think how you shine by comparison! I'm *fearfully* taken with you. Gilded leather—lead garden figures—Fiona Macleod—Pish! *Posh!*"

"Oh, don't be so hard on him. I wish you liked him; I've known him since we were kids, and I understand him. He's had a rotten sort of life, a delicate morbid boy brought up by servants. He's done pretty well, considering that he's always had too much money and nothing to do. He has an interesting mind; if you knew him better you'd like him better. And you'll find him responsive—he's as sensitive as a sensitive plant. He's a lonely soul —be nice to him, Marigold."

"All right, I'll try to be, but because of you, not because of him. I—don't—like him!"

But she dressed herself with care for Miss Archibald's dinner. She might not like Hugo, but she wanted him to admire her, and she felt that he had the seeing eye; not like George, who, if he noticed a frock at all, would say, on its twentieth appearance. "New dress, Marigold?" She wore a quaint,

full little frock of blue-grey taffeta, sashed with scarlet; and her blue eyes were dark, and her pink cheeks bright, as Hugo drew out the chair for her at Miss Archibald's table.

"How can you call youself a flower lover, and have these on the table, Aunt?" questioned Hugo, looking with distaste at the centerpiece of elderly dahlias that had been freshened by having their withered petals pulled out, so that each flower presented a circlet of coloured petals backed by a quantity of semi-transparent greenish yellow scales. "Why in the world didn't you come up to the gardens and help yourself?"

"I like these—quite a blaze of colour. The scarlet and the magenta ones are quite wonderful together, aren't they? So daring, quite a shout! I'm not contented with one æsthetic iris and some coloured pebbles, as you are, Hugo, I must have masses!"

"Flower arranging is rather important, don't you think?" Hugo asked Marigold. "I should never dream of leaving it to servants, as most people do. I had a butler once who came to me from Lord Inchpen, who was forever asking if he mightn't do the flowers, as he'd always done them at Staines—Inchpen's seat, you know—so one night I let him. My dear, what do you think he did? An American flag of red, white and blue flowers, done in ripples!" He closed his eyes for a moment, as if the very memory made him feel faint, and then went on.

“So much depends on the room, doesn’t it? My drawing-room in Paris, for example, absolutely cries aloud for crimson and purple anemones: it has white paneled walls, with old Venetian looking-glasses, wavy and dim and green, like the sea——”

A small sniffing creature, looking like a leprechaun wearing its hair in a charwoman’s bun, here offered a dish composed chiefly of a bit of gristle and a bit of bone, hidden under rice, and Hugo Curry interrupted his aunt, who was giving George a highly technical talk on the breeding of English sheep dogs, to ask: “Is this the work of my cook, Aunt?”

“Oh, I forgot to tell you, Hugo, I sent her back.” She made a terrific face behind the back of the leprechaun, evidently intended to convey diplomatically that they must wait for further information until she had left the room, which she did soon, with the dragging step of a fox caught in a trap.

“You see, Bridgie—that’s Bridgie, only we’d better call her something else, in case she comes back unexpectedly—Alice, say—well, Bridgie—Alice, I mean—came in last night, just off the road. She evidently had had a leading. She’s willing to do everything, cook, wait, clean, it’s quite wonderful. I should have let you know I didn’t need Mrs. Bent, Hugo, but I quite forgot I was giving a dinner this evening until she appeared. Bridg—Alice—is the most colourful creature, pure Celt, that Irish charm, you know.”

"She looks like a bit of the bog," said Hugo coldly.

"All the sorrow of Ireland in her heart, and the wit of it on her tongue!" Miss Archibald went on, with enthusiasm. "Sure, she's seen Thim Wans! In the moonlight under a thorn tree it was, and the next day wasn't it O'Leary's Kathleen was gone from the place of her, and niver a wan afther laying eyes on her again at all at all! And didn't Bridgie —Alice, I mean—find a little wee shoe, no bigger than would hold your thumb—the thumb of you, I mean—under a hedge where a fairy cobbler had dropped it. What are soufflés and entrées to *that*, may I ask? She's seen the Ould Boy, let me tell you, and wasn't himself afther pushing her straight into the lake of the rushes, with her feet in the air and her head in the water—*wather*—and if his Riverence Father Sullivan hadn't chanced by, sure it's there she'd be yet. It was picking the primroses she was on May-Eve and as I was saying, Dr. Bellamy, golf is so good for getting men out into the open air!"

This remarkable climax was occasioned by the dragging entrance of Bridgie-Alice with a dish of ice-cream that had been frozen so hard that for a time conversation was almost drowned by the clash of spoons slipping to plates as the diners struggled to chip bits off the stony substance. But later, in the little parlour, while a muffled groaning behind

the ~~out~~spread music on the piano indicated that Miss Archibald was singing, and while Rover and Fido lifted up their heads and sang, too, Hugo talked to Marigold. He drew his chair very near hers, and talked in a low murmur, in order not to disturb the music, for which George was turning the leaves.

“I’m going to be very brave, Mrs. Bellamy, and ask the most tremendous favour. Directly I saw you, I knew I couldn’t be happy until I’d tried to paint you—I daub a bit; George may have told you. Will you be wonderful, and let me do you?”

Miss Archibald, in the midst of one of India’s Love Lyrics, remarked tunefully:

“You’d *bet-ter* ask George, he’s hearing ev’ry word you *sa-ay*
And look-ing quite cross I make it clean and bri-ight,
Love’s last reward, Death, comes to me toni-ight——”

“George, may I paint your wife? Aunt will bring her pipe and chaperon us, won’t you, Aunt? And talk Irish to Mrs. Bellamy to bring a dream to the eye of her—or, if you can’t come, Aunt perhaps you’ll lend us the Sprig of Shamrock herself. Do say you will, Mrs. Bellamy!”

“I’ll think about it,” said flattered Marigold. She felt beautiful and cherished for the rest of the evening, and when she overheard Hugo say to Miss Archibald: “The porcelain tints of the little thing! The purity of colour!” and again when he

touched her finger-tips to his lips at parting, murmuring: "Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine!" she found it almost impossible not to smirk.

But when George said from his dressing-room, between two great yawns: "Didn't you find you'd been too hard on Hugo? You seemed to be having a good time together to-night," she answered vehemently:

"I can't *bear* him! Conceited thing! Being subtle and whimsical all over the shop, and shuddering at colours, and wincing at noises——!"

She decided that nothing would induce her to pose for him. Later, lying awake, she thought perhaps she would, after all. He wouldn't talk when he was painting, and it would be nice for her children to have a portrait of their mother when she was young. Still later, sleeping, it was of him she dreamed.

CHAPTER XIX

POSING FOR HUGO

HUGO CURRY'S portrait of Marigold did not progress far: Hugo was not given to finishing things. His paintings were notes of fresh and charming colour, but they remained notes. Hands he could not draw, so most of his ladies carried muffs, or, if they had been painted when the weather was warm, plunged their fingers deep into splashes of crimson lake or prussian blue, that were, when you stood far enough away and half shut your eyes, masses of roses or larkspur.

He not only painted in water-colours, but wrote little poems, untrammelled by meter or rhyme, that sounded as if they might mean a great deal if you only had time to think them out. These he copied, in a small, exquisite hand, into a large volume with vellum leaves, bound in green leather beautifully tooled in gold, and sometimes he painted for them initial letters, sprouting with vines and flowers of scarlet and blue. One or two poems about Marigold found their way into the book, comparing her to almond blossoms in the rain, or white foam on the sea. He improvised, and often sat for an hour

or so in the twilight calling forth quite Debussy-like chords from the piano; and here again Marigold was often an inspiration. Also he sang, in a small, pleasant, tenor voice, obscure folk-songs, or ballads in old French.

“It is such a mistake to pursue things to the bitter end,” he said to Marigold while she posed for him. “I don’t believe in bitter ends—or in ends at all, or in finishing things. Take anything exquisite—mist—the scent of flowers—the colour in a sunset sky—no end, no abrupt finishing, but a subtle shading off into nothings. Why shouldn’t we learn from Nature? A finished thing is an insult to one’s intelligence—a door swung shut in one’s face. A thing left, as I am leaving this little sketch of you, is a path, a vista, a glimpsing of far hills. It isn’t just in painting or poetry or music, but all through life, one should learn the art of leaving things unfinished.”

Marigold, secretly rather impressed, repeated these views to George.

“Fine idea!” he agreed amiably. “I’ll try it the next time I have a surgical case—fade away like the scent of a flower while I’m sawing up my patient—and you do it when you’re paying bills. Never finish, darling, never finish. Be a mist and melt away just before you write out a check for the butcher. Or write it, but don’t sign it. I’ll bet Hugo’s made a disciple of the cook—those sweet-

breads last night were the most unfinished things I've struck in some time."

She described the sittings to George. "It's just like the movies," she said. "When I think of Father's studio—so bare, with a little stove, and an easel, and a kitchen table for his paints and things, and one big couch covered with shabby denim—and then look at Hugo's! If any paint got on anything there, he'd *die*. Prayer rugs, and tapestries, and apple-green walls and purple silk hangings, because he vibrates to apple-green and purple, and an open fire, and pots of fuschias, because he vibrates to fuschias—George, really and truly, I feel as pop-eyed as Samanthy Hicks from Podgers' Corners. And *tidy*! I think he'd really like to paint in gloves. Directly he's through for the day he dashes behind a Chinese screen that was once the property of Clarissa, Lady Cheese-Parings—"

"Of Muffins-cum-Butter—"

"Hot-Milk Moat—"

"Hurry-Scurry—"

"Bampton, Biff! What was I telling you? Oh, I know—Hugo dashing behind the screen. And then, my dear, he takes a bath, practically, and emerges, having shed his painting smock, in a brocaded house-coat—"

"Vibrating like forty, I suppose?"

"Vibrating all over the place. You must have a house-coat, George. We can't afford brocade, but

I'll have enough chintz left over to make you one when my new bed-room curtains are done—blue, with bunches of field-flowers—you'll look magnificent. And then we have Hugo's own particular private tea that's grown 'only for him and the Emperor of China—it's kept locked up in a lacquered cabinet with dragons on it, and Hugo unlocks it himself, and measures it out, and shows me dried jasmine buds in it—oh, and I forgot to tell you that there's a little incense burning all the time—really and truly cinema, you see, so far as setting goes."

"How about plot?"

"Isn't any plot—there I sit, expecting to have my fatal beauty go to his head like wine, and it goes to his head like an ice-cream soda. Hugo's much too neat to get mixed up in any plot, my dear."

"Miss Archibald told me she had no doubt he was keeping half the pretty actresses in Paris."

"Miss Archibald's a born optimist. She told *me* about his socks—dozens and dozens of pairs, arranged so that they shade from thick to thin, and from colour to colour—that I *can* believe."

She did not grow to like Hugo himself as the days went on, but she liked his attitude towards her. She liked the look in his eyes as he studied her; his little, lightly flattering speeches that always suggested so much withheld, unspoken; she

liked his air of a delicate secret between them, although what the secret was she would have been puzzled to say. She realized that he missed "no slightest subtlety of all her graceful gestures. She, for her part, responded perfectly. She had said (had, indeed, meant) that Hugo's gentle voice made her long to shout, that his exquisite, and, to be candid, old-maidish ways inspired her to roughness and toughness. But when she was with him she could no more help being gentle and exquisite, than a drop of water can help looking the colour of the leaf it lies on. The stage was set for preciosity, and Marigold knew her part.

On the last day she posed for him, Hugo said:

"It's a poor thing, Marigold—but I'll be grateful to it always, because it's given me you, so that I'll never forget the least line or tint of you. I've shut you up in my mind forever, whether you're willing or not."

"It's lovely! Much, much too good-looking, but I like that. George will love it."

"You can't forget George for a moment, can you?"

"I don't want to forget him."

"No, of course not. Nor George you, I suppose. Idyllic, what, as Aunt would say. Stop to lunch, won't you?"

"No, I must hurry home—I had a coat somewhere——"

Helping her into it, he suddenly drew its furred collar close together beneath her chin, tilted her face upwards, and kissed her on the mouth.

She was scandalized. That afternoon a great hamper of tea-roses came from him, and a note. She read the note, holding it between thumb and finger, and then tore it into tiny pieces: and with flaming face she crammed the roses into the ash-barrel, from which they were presently rescued by the more appreciative cook. She wanted to tell George what had happened, but he did not come home to dinner that night, and as she lay waiting for him, hearing the clock strike eleven and twelve, she decided, with a distinct feeling of relief, that she had no right to purchase her own peace of mind at the cost of his. Still later, for she found it hard to sleep that night, she thought:

“Perhaps I’m being silly—after all, what’s a kiss? I suppose in Paris everybody’s getting kissed all the time. Perhaps I’m being prim and babyish. Anyway, he couldn’t have apologized more wonderfully than he did in that note—and all those roses——”

She thought, deep in her heart, ashamed:

“Of course I’m *not*, but George thinks I’m beautiful—and Don thought so—and Hugo thinks so—perhaps he couldn’t help it.”

She decided to be broad-minded, a woman of

the great world. She would let him see that what he had done had not shocked her as much as it had bored her. She graciously permitted a penitent Hugo to come to tea one afternoon—an occasion that went off with almost disappointing propriety.

After that, he fell into the way of coming and going almost like one of the family. George no longer had to urge her to be tolerant towards him. She cared nothing for him, but she grew to depend on the stimulating vision of herself as seen by him.

She was happy that winter, although she had her days of depression. George had never been more busy, and if it had not been for Hugo, she would have been much alone. Sometimes her thoughts turned to Donald, wherever he was—under the pine-needles and periwinkle of the grave-yard, or in God's tall town of the golden streets. Occasionally something brought him, idealized, back to her heart with aching intensity—snow falling in white veils on a white earth, a poem about first, lost loves calling out of the past, or George's failure to remark on some such surprise as duck for dinner, or a new lamp-shade. Now and then she feared that George no longer loved her: as, for instance, when after a hearty tea, she felt rather wan, and barely touched her dinner: George could not have known about all the currant buns she had eaten, and yet he seemed not in the least worried at her lack of appetite. And sometimes he behaved, she

thought, rather too much like a husband; which meant that he considered the household bills a bit too high, or the breakfast eggs a bit too mature. But these moments were no more than the shadows of fair-weather clouds, flying over sunny fields.

Mrs. Boynton, who had forgiven the Bellamys to a distracting extent, thought that Marigold was being seen too often with Hugo Curry. People met them riding through lonely lanes, or caught sight of them in Hugo's motor, behind his chauffeur and footman in their dark blue livery. She had been to lunch one day, when there were grapes almost as large as eggs, and Marigold had shown no shame whatever about saying that they came from Hugo's hothouses. Once, going to call, she had happened on Mr. Curry sitting on the floor reading poetry aloud: and on that occasion she had noticed quantities of red and yellow carnations about the living-room, of a sort that Mr. McGrath did not keep in his shop, for she had made it a point to go in and ask, just as if she wanted them for herself, on her way home. In fact, Mr. McGrath said Mrs. Bellamy had very seldom bought anything from him, except some hyacinth bulbs and glasses: so Mrs. Boynton was forced to suppose that the carnations came from the same place that the grapes did.

“You ought to speak to her, Eva,” Mrs. Marshall said to Mrs. Boynton. “*We* all know there's noth-

ing in it, but any one who didn't know the little lady as well as we do would *wonder*, to say the *very* least! Dorothy says Walter says he can't *imagine* a red-blooded man's man, like Dr. Bellamy, letting it go on, right under his nose! Of course that's *always* the way! My Mona said the other day that the Bellamy's laundress (she's Mona's cousin) said their waitress told her he was there morning, noon, and night. 'Laws, chile,' Mona said to me—you know her way of talking, real old Southern style—'Laws, Mis' Marshall, honey, gwine to be trouble in dat direction if white folkses is anything like black folkses.' Just think of its being so noticeable that a poor ignorant coloured girl sees it! You ought to speak to her, Eva; you were just the same as a mother to her for so long!"

"It helps me bear it, Carrie, to think my boy was spared this."

"My, yes, dear! You couldn't have stood that, with your loyal nature! But you speak to her, or to Dr. Bellamy. It would be the act of a true friend to tell them the truth, no matter how much it hurts. I know if *I* was getting myself talked about, I'd thank any one to tell me."

Mrs. Boynton said she would think about it.

Miss Messie and Miss Battie Hall heard whispers, and were talking them over together, shocked and excited, when George came in one afternoon to see Miss Battie, who was afraid she was getting

a quinsy sore throat. He wondered why they looked so guilty, and why their little faces turned so bright a pink.

“I’ll bet you were talking scandal about me!” he said, to make them laugh: at which, to his astonishment, Miss Battie burst into tears. She loved George, and never forgot that when he was a little boy, once when she hurt her back and had to lie on the sofa for weeks, he used to come to see her almost every day, bringing his books to lend her. He had lent her, “Frank on a Gunboat”, and “The Young Defenders”, and “Toby Tyler, or Ten Weeks with the Circus”, and she had found them quite invigorating. He had brought her all the asters from his own garden, too, squeezed tightly together, with very short stems; he had brought her a small bag of sugar hearts, pink and white and yellow, with “Kiss me, Dear”, and “Don’t be Shy”, and like amorous instructions, printed on them in red. She could not bear to think of unhappiness coming to him, or of unfriendly tongues talking of his affairs.

“My dear, I have the most amusing news for you!” Hugo announced to Marigold one day. “We’re being talked about—yes, you and I. Really talked about—isn’t it heavenly? Perhaps now Aunt will put us in her book. She always scorned us for being too proper before.”

"I love it!" Marigold answered. "I can't *wait* to tell George. Hugo, who told you?" "

"Aunt. She's so pleased. That Mrs. Juliet Jiggiwig creature came to call—you know the one I mean?"

"Yes, I know. I can't remember her name, but the one who lectures on looking into the heart of a lily and saying 'Peace, Peace!'"

"She said a jolly lot more than 'Peace, Peace' this time. She had that fearful Marshall woman with her, and they told Aunt that while of course they knew we were pure as the lilies——"

"Peace, Peace!"

"Yet they felt that *I* should be told—and *you* should be told—and *George* should be told—oh, all manner of things! Being so pure, I blush at the thought of them. But Aunt was charmed, and, I gather, gave them to understand that we were leading lives of scarlet sin."

Marigold laughed, but she felt rather troubled. Hugo, always sensitive to her moods, said:

"It doesn't amuse you, really, does it? I'm sorry. Shall I stop away? But it's all such nonsense! Shall I tell Jiggiwig and Marshall the truth? Shall I go to them, and say: 'Mesdames, unfortunately your suppositions are incorrect. While I am madly in love with Mrs. Bellamy, the lady spurns my passion'?"

“Yes, do. That *would* make everything all right.”

“And it has the advantage of being true.”

She smiled, slightly embarrassed. Hugo repeated:

“Marigold, you know it’s true. It’s been true ever since I’ve known you. Poor child, I’m making you so uncomfortable. You’re a complex little character, aren’t you? Torn between primness and poetry. Speaking of poetry, I’ve brought you that new book of poems from London that I said I’d get for you—delicious! Vivid and whimsical—listen:

Brittle and bitter, blue shadows of delicate iris——”

She did not hear him as he read. She was thinking of what he had told her. She must tell George, and make him laugh about it. She wondered why it was not easier to think of telling George. Before she had loved him, it had been easy to tell him anything, everything. Even last summer—but last summer there had been nothing to tell except her love and her happiness. And now, loving him more than ever she had before, she found it difficult to think of telling him that people were talking about her—even although they were absurd people, like Mrs. Juliet Jiggiwig. Talking about her, and coupling her name with Hugo Curry’s.

George would understand: he would not fail her. But had she failed him? Of course she had done

nothing wrong, but had she been quite honest? With hot cheeks, she admitted to herself that she had let Hugo believe, at times, that she was not quite happy with her husband. She had never really said it—but a look, a gesture, an unspoken word, had made for him a picture of herself, lovely and lonely, not completely understood, not completely appreciated, but facing life with high courage and splendid loyalty. Loyalty! She felt sick at the thought of what her loyalty had been to the one in all the world she loved, her husband, who was her friend and her lover. She felt that she had betrayed him just to make herself more interesting to another man. She had not even the excuse of caring for Hugo. It was not worth it. She would stop seeing so much of him, and show him by her manner that she was no longer amused by their graceful little game.

For a few days she did not see him except when George was with them. Then she decided that she had been exaggerating the importance of the whole affair. Hugo was going back to Paris in the spring, and meanwhile she could not bear to hurt him by showing him too plainly that she wanted no more of his company.

As for Hugo's feelings, they had become more involved than he found altogether convenient. He had not meant to grow so fond of Marigold. He preferred affairs with married women because they

had not anxious mothers who instantly looked on him as a possible son-in-law, but he never went too far. He was always nobly renunciatory before their husbands became inconveniently annoyed, or before their own thoughts fastened too firmly on the image of themselves reaching his houses, his yacht, his motors, and himself, *via* the divorce courts. But Marigold was unlike the rest. She touched something deeper in him, she troubled him. He tried to define her charm to himself; she was changeful; she never bored him. Sometimes she was all woman, alluring and questioning, Eve, with the apple red in her hand; sometimes she was as cool and aloof and young as a child in the nursery. "A passion-flower in a pinafore," he said to himself, rather liking the phrase.

He had put off going back to Paris in order to be near her; but now it was time to go. She was growing more of a pain than a pleasure to him; he, who could never bear the thought of a woman living in his house, getting powder on his rugs, and talking in the morning, found himself wishing that Marigold were free to marry him. He believed that she cared for him, although she was so loyal to George that she tried to hide her feelings.

George alone was not torn by this thought and that thought. He was completely happy. His work filled his days; and, at the end of each day, shining and sweet and true, a spring in the desert, a star in the sky, was Marigold.

CHAPTER XX

SUNDAY NIGHT SUPPER

SPRING came; slowly at first, with an uncurling of fury leaves in sheltered corners, and with grass growing green under the melting snow: then, suddenly, the violets bloomed beneath the hedge, the bare branches of the trees were powdered with tiny leaves, and the birds were busy looking out sites for their nests. Primroses pushed through last autumn's dead leaves, and lay like shafts of pale sunshine along the borders. The bulbs that George and Marigold had planted burst into bloom; and asparagus and strawberries were to be had at the green-grocer's, although they were still expensive.

Miss Archibald, dropping in to see Marigold, found Mr. Banks, in his clerical black, paying a call. The conversation turned on the daffodils with which the room was alight, and Mr. Banks genteelly quoted Wordsworth.

“The yellow love-children of Spring,” said Miss Archibald, briskly. “I didn’t make that up, Oscar Wilde did. Too bad he had to say ‘yellow’—sounds so jaundiced. Perhaps he didn’t. I may have put that in myself. I’m only sure of the love-child part.

Dear Oscar! Rather old-fashioned now, of course, but a glorious soul, don't you agree?" She turned to Mr. Banks, who blinked, but remembered that a clergyman must be first of all a man of the world.

"*Wonderful* creature! So quaint!" Miss Archibald exclaimed enthusiastically, after he had gone. "The one finishing touch you need for this room, Marigold. It's so Victorian, anyway, with its high ceilings and crimson curtains, and the marble fireplace, and the candelabra prisms, and those pantaletted paintings—and *then*, to have a calling clergyman! Just the right dark touch—*too* bad you can't have him stuffed, and keep him here! Why don't you have a waxwork one made? You could even have a dean, with gaiters—sitting right where he sat, with a cup in one hand and a muffin in the other. Do! But I didn't come to talk interior decoration—I came on business. My dear, have you any particular use for the dandelion plants on your lawn?"

"I certainly haven't."

"May I have them?"

"Of course you may. Going to make dandelion wine again?"

"*Much* more than that. I've had an inspiration. Don't tell Hugo, but I'm going to turn the lodge into a tea-house! Not like ordinary tea-houses—no everlasting old blue-birds and cinnamon toast. Dandelions are to be our specialty. In the first

place, I'm going to set out hundreds of plants in the lawn—it will be a regular knock-out blaze of glory! Nothing's prettier than a dandelion. Then I'll have a sign out—‘The Dent du Lion Tea House’, or, ‘The Little Hostel of the Dent du Lion’. Too bad Hugo won't have time to paint it for me free before he sails: however, he'd probably make some silly objection to the whole scheme, so I won't bother him. Then, my dear, dandelion wine and boiled dandelion greens the *specialités* of the place. *Nobody* eats enough boiled dandelion greens—they're fearfully rich in something, I've forgotten just what for the moment, but anyway, boiled greens instead of anything dainty. Dainty food! Rubadubdub! The cost would be nothing—water and salt, and I could live on what was left over. Of course, I'd have to have some other things, I suppose, but not many. I shall dress in dandelion yellow—silk fringe, with a green sash. Hasn't the idea the most astonishing possibilities? And then you wouldn't mind popping over to be hostess on the days I didn't feel up to it, or wanted to write. I dare say it would be quite a help to my writing, in the way of giving me fresh characters to study. It can't help making heaps of money—I forgot to say it's to be for the benefit of the Socialist Party. Needn't mention that to Hugo—he's apt to go off half-cocked. So I may tell William to save me your dandelions?”

“When will you begin?”

“Next week, when Hugo’s gone. Mind you don’t give me away.”

Hugo was to leave on Monday, and on Sunday night he and his aunt were to take supper with the Bellamys. On Sunday afternoon Marigold lay in her hammock under the apple-trees that stood deep in bright fine grass, tufted here and there with darker blades. Grotesque patterns of grey mould clung to the trunks of the twisted trees, and the branches were covered with clusters of frail petals. Near her, George reclined, looped strangely in an old steamer chair. He had added holiday touches to his costume—a cricket blazer striped in black and green, and a pair of aged dancing pumps. She looked at him with a heart aching with love, and, as if she had spoken his name aloud, his eyes answered hers.

“Rather swish, what?” he inquired. “I speak English, my child, because I’m vibrating to my blazer. But it *is* swish, isn’t it?”

“What is?”

“Everything. You looking so pretty with all those petals in your hair, and me looking so handsome with my blazer——”

“And your pumps! Wherever did you get them, George? They look like the ones you find on beaches, with seaweed and crabs, only I never knew they came two at a time.”

“Very handsome slippers,” said George, regarding them. “You’re quite right, Marigold, fine old antiques like these are difficult to find in pairs. Oh, what a peach of a day! Let’s take our supper and go off in the car, shall we?”

“I’d love to, but we can’t. Miss Archibald and Hugo are coming, you know.”

“Oh, Lord! So they are. I’ll be glad when he’s gone—he’s always here. I never seem to have you to myself any more. You’ve been a lamb about being decent to him, darling, but I never thought he’d hang around so when I asked you to try to put up with him.”

“Never mind, he’s off to-morrow. George——”

“Yes, dear?”

“Nothing—only I love you.”

He got up, shedding Sunday papers, and came to her side.

“And I love you, my precious. Gosh, how I love you! I can’t tell you——. We’re close together, aren’t we?”

“We are—oh, we are!”

“People in general are so rotten—I feel sometimes as if I couldn’t trust any one. I get awfully down in the mouth—but then there’s always you. I think about you, and it keeps me going. You don’t know what you mean to me——”

She slid from the hammock, and sat on the grass. George lay with his head in her lap; tremulous

petals floated down on them, and an occasional insect walked ticklingly over George's face, calling forth despairing cries. Other cries presently joined these, as Katie the maid summoned Marigold to the telephone by the simple method of standing at the kitchen door and screaming until she came.

"Guess who this is!" said a voice over the wire.

"Queen Mary," Marigold guessed.

"Pardon? I didn't catch that."

"I'm sorry—it's so stupid of me—but I'm afraid I don't know."

"Well, it's been a long time since you heard me—it's Ada Dunham speaking—Ada Dunham Thompson, I *should* say. Mr. Thompson and myself were passing through on an auto trip, and we just felt we *couldn't* go by without a peep at you, and we thought if you were going to be home this evening we'd just look in and say how do, but you must be very very frank with us and tell us if you were planning to go out, because we wouldn't upset any plans for the *world*, but we just have this one evening here, the friends we are with, the Bakers, I don't believe you ever met them, they want to get on to Shelton Falls to-night, so I said to Mr. Thompson, I'm going to ring up Mrs. Bellamy and see if she and her good husband are going to be home this evening——"

Marigold thought: "Oh, dear! I must ask them to supper—of all nights in the year!" She had

been so anxious to make one last impression on Hugo Curry. Hugo and Kenneth! But she said warmly:

“Mrs. Thompson! How wonderful! Of course we will be at home, and you and your husband must come to supper.”

“That’s very very sweet of you—just a moment while I ask Mr. Thompson.” Marigold could hear the ghost of a voice saying: “She says can we come to supper; why, yes, I guess so, I’ll ask her.” Then the voice, loud again. “Mr. Thompson hasn’t his Tuxedo, he says would it be all right if he wore his grey suit? Well, that would be lovely, because the Bakers have relatives here, the W. P. Buttons on Woodland Street, you probably know them, that asked them to supper, so they thought we would start for Shelton Falls about ten, it’s only about three-quarters of an hour’s run, so that would give us time for a nice little visit with you——”

She ended on an arch note: “Well, if you’re *positively* sure we won’t be keeping you from anything, we’d *love* to come.”

Marigold, depressed, went to the kitchen to break the news of extra guests to an already despondent cook, and then helped Katie to change the dining-table. Everything was for Hugo to-night—the candles; the flowers; the fruit that she had arranged like a tail-piece to a Victorian story; the finger-bowls, each of different coloured glass, purple and

amber, crimson and meadow-green. She wanted to make a gesture of farewell that Hugo would remember through the years. She wanted a dark and dignified background of old things and gentle ways, and herself shining against it, very young and tender. As she dressed for dinner she tried on various expressions for him before her mirror: naïve gaiety; gentle sympathy; twinkling mischief; a look that was a little wistful and lonely. She liked that best. Watching the curve of her cheek with the help of her hand-glass, she talked with animation to an imaginary Kenneth, and saw what Hugo would see as he sat beside her. Curve of soft cheek, fall of bright hair, sweep of dark lashes; it was quite satisfactory.

George was practicing putts on the hearth-rug when she went down to the drawing-room a few minutes before supper time; and Hugo was improvising at the piano. As she paused in the doorway, George called out: "Here she is! Here she is, looking like a million dollars in her little shiny dress!" and Hugo, kissing her hand, asked: "What is your name to-night, Moon-Light or Moth-Wing?" With such greetings, it was difficult to keep from looking complacent.

"Aunt will be here soon; I left her starting with one of the footmen. Her new embroidery frame came yesterday, and she is bringing it with her. I came early with some marvelous strawberries for

you—I've taken them out and given them to Cook myself. She tells me we're to have cheese soufflé, so don't dream of waiting for Aunt."

"Two other people are coming, a Mrs. Thompson, who used to teach school with me a hundred years ago, and her husband."

"Good Lord, Marigold, why do we have to have them? How annoying! We were perfect as it was—you for beauty, George for brains, Aunt for absurdity, and I for appreciation—why any one else?"

George, who had been complaining to Marigold along the same lines, instantly became a warm champion of the Thompsons.

Weaving his melodies at the piano, Hugo talked to himself and them.

"Really, this room is rather nice. It has a something—the white walls—the long red curtains—and the shadows. You've done the flowers charmingly, Princess. Those ruby glasses on the mantelpiece with the pale rose and creamy yellow tulips and the blue hyacinths—I couldn't have arranged them better myself. I like your room to-night."

"How fortunate," said George mildly, as he made an imaginary approach shot.

Mr. and Mrs. Thompson were announced, and hurried in, the lady bursting with apologies.

"Miss Trent! Mercy, listen to me! Mrs. Bellamy, I mean, but it was Miss Trent for so

long—! You must excuse us for being late, but the Bakers brought us, and Mr. Baker would have it that you turned *left* at the pond, although Mr. Thompson *told* him you said turn *right*, but when it isn't your own auto you feel sort of delicate about *insisting*—”

“You've not kept us waiting at all; another of our guests hasn't come yet.”

“Oh, Mrs. Bellamy, you never told us it was a dinner-party, and Mr. Thompson in his business suit!”

“I wouldn't mind if he'd come in his bathing-suit, I wanted you both so much,” said Marigold politely. Mr. Thompson looked prim, and adjusted his pince-nez. He hoped it was not going to be a fast party.

“I'm very very glad to meet you, Doctor!” Ada was assuring George. “I almost feel as if I know you already, Mrs. Bellamy and I are such old friends! My, what times we used to have together with the kiddies! And then I was hearing about you just this afternoon—did your ears burn? I was telling Mrs. Bellamy over the phone, she may have told you, that our friends the Bakers have relatives here, the W. P. Huttons on Woodland Avenue—”

“Street,” corrected Kenneth, from the midst of conversation with Marigold.

“Pardon, dear?”

“Woodland *Street*, not *Avenue*.”

“Oh, yes, *Street*—let’s see, what was I saying? Isn’t that *funny*! My mind must be going! It’s just on the tip of my tongue——”

George, who had not been listening, looked bright, but not particularly helpful.

“Oh, I know, the Huttons—they were so interested to hear that we were coming to supper with you—I think they said they didn’t know you *personally*, but that Mrs. Hutton’s aunt was a patient of yours, though I don’t recall the name just this minute—perhaps Mr. Thompson will. Dear —pardon me, Mrs. Bellamy—do you remember the name of Mrs. Hutton’s aunt that they said was a patient of Dr. Bellamy’s? Oh, yes, McClung, Miss McClung. Really, it’s quite funny, isn’t it, how you can almost always find a mutual friend?”

“I implore you not to wait for Aunt any longer —she is too absurd!” Hugo broke in; but, as he spoke, a hearty voice shouted: “Speaking of angels!” and Miss Archibald came through one of the open French windows: behind her the light fell on an enormous embroidery frame which partly hid a purple and perspiring footman.

“Try it sideways, Alfred, you can get it in easily. My dears, we’ve been stuck in the hedge for hours, and only just struggled free—didn’t you hear us screaming in the starlight? I left most of my clothes

behind me, and my hair is full of twigs and birdsnests—never mind, who cares? Marigold, you must take up embroidery, too! I'm never going to do anything else again. I'm going to start an arras this evening with a design of all the illicit loves of the past—do all see if you can't think of some that I've forgotten."

Mr. Thompson seemed about to swoon.

Marigold looked around the table as they sat at supper—prim Kenneth, eating his asparagus so genteely, and prim Ada in her dark blue dress, quirking out her little finger as she raised her glass—Miss Archibald, with her wild grey hair full of intentional pansies and unintentional bits of hedge—Hugo, immaculate and exquisite, his face white between the black of his stock and the burnished black of his hair.

And George.

Her eyes met his for an instant, and there flashed between them a look of love and laughter and understanding, bright as a banner in the sun. He and she! Forever and ever!

She realized that Mr. Thompson was ending a long, mild monologue, and applied herself to listening, and to making interested comments. Hugo, on her left, murmured:

"Ever the perfect hostess! Marigold, what a little fraud you are!"

"I'm not."

“You’re a sweet little fraud, at any rate—do you know how enchantingly pretty you are to-night? Nobody knows it better, I fancy. There’s a tendril of hair that curls up on your cheek—my fingers ache to tuck it back. If I did, would it shock the lady next me?”

The moment held them in a curious intimacy, seeing the others, but apart from them, as if they were enclosed in a crystal globe, until Ada Thompson’s voice broke through:

“I was just talking about golf with your good husband, Mrs. Bellamy; and it reminded me of such a good thing Mr. Thompson said the other day—tell them, Kenneth, you know, what you said to Mr. Clark.”

“I don’t just place what you are referring to, Ada.”

“Oh, yes, dear, you remember, you told me about it afterwards, and I thought it was so good—you know, about it’s seeming foolish to chase a little quinine pill——”

“Oh, that! Well, it really wasn’t much of anything,” said Mr. Thompson modestly. “I just happened to be talking with Mr. Clark, H. J. Clark, of Clark and White, you may be acquainted with him, Doctor—and he was urging me to take up golf; so when he was all through talking I simply said——”

“Very very quietly——” put in Ada, beaming.

“That to me it seemed a foolish waste of time to chase round after a little quinine pill over a ten acre lot all day. It didn’t seem to leave him anything to say.”

“And the cream of the joke is that Mr. Thompson didn’t know at the time that Mr. Clark was president of the Wee Burnie Golf Club——”

“A Scotch name,” explained Mr. Thompson, helping himself sparingly to strawberries. Ada gave a warning cry.

“Oh, *Kenneth!* I know Mrs. Bellamy will excuse you if you don’t eat any berries! Pardon me, Mr. Curry, I didn’t mean to make you jump, but I was so afraid Mr. Thompson would eat some berries unless I spoke quickly, he has such a strong sense of politeness, and I knew what *that* would mean—he has to be very very careful! Mr. Thompson likes strawberries, but strawberries don’t like him.”

Hugo looked as if he were at one with the strawberries, as Ada went on to give him a list of those foods which Mr. Thompson could not eat with safety, but Miss Archibald was deeply interested.

“You ought to try standing on your head, Mr. Johnson,” she advised. “It’s the greatest comfort, a complete change mentally and physically. All the Hindus do it. You take my advice—drink a glass of buttermilk, and then stand on your head five minutes, night and morning, and you won’t know you’re the same person.”

In the drawing-room Miss Archibald settled to her embroidery, explaining that she was going to make it up out of her head as she went along. "I can't be bothered by any set plan—did you ever know embroidery frames kicked about so? I think that fool of an Alfred did something to this one, I could see plainly that he'd taken a dislike to it. Don't expect me to hear or speak until I get this started. Put my coffee where I can gulp it down if I have a moment—what's the liqueur? Crème de menthe? Haven't you anything stronger? Bring me a glass of whatever the gentlemen are having, Katie. Now nobody speak to me until I say they may." She became enmeshed in a tangle of silks.

"No coffee, thanks, I wouldn't sleep a wink—no, I don't smoke, Mr. Thompson doesn't like it—not that he isn't broad-minded, but he's just very fastidious—he always says it's all right for other women to smoke, but he wouldn't want to see his wife or his mother doing it, and I think really it's a very lovely feeling. Well, now, I want to hear all about what you've been doing—I certainly was surprised to hear you were married—I just could hardly believe it! I'm ever so anxious to hear all about your wedding—the paper didn't give any details. I suppose it was very artistic. I said to Miss Hopper, 'I just know Miss Trent's wedding was simple and artistic, with all her taste.' I think simple weddings are really the sweetest, don't you? Ours was

very very simple, just relatives and intimate friends. I had a white net dress over white silk, and Edna Brown, she was my maid of honour, you know, she was in pink. Oh, yes, and little Mary Louise Huff, Mr. Thompson's little niece, was flower-girl in pale blue—she looked just like a little fairy! I always think pink and blue is such a dainty colour scheme, don't you? I don't know whether you're interested——?”

“Indeed I am!”

“Well, the decorations were very simple—I think that's always more dignified, don't you? Mamma had a lot of Boston ferns already, and we borrowed some more, and banked them round the bay window, and then Dr. Hass stood there to perform the ceremony. Oh, yes, and just before we came in, Mrs. Huff, little Mary Louise's mother, sang, 'I Love You Truly'. Mercy, Mrs. Bellamy, you've got me feeling like a bride again, and I an old married woman with a kiddie nearly two years old!”

“Tell me about your little boy. I don't even know his name.”

“Well, we had quite a time about that. His father thought Peregrine would be nice, after that baby that was born on the Mayflower, you know, you so seldom hear that name nowadays, and it appeals to Mr. Thompson on account of his love for antiques; but Papa took a dislike to it, and kept saying it put him in mind of some kind of salt

fish; and even though it turned out it was kedgeree he was thinking of, it sort of spoiled the idea for us. Well, then we thought of Junior, but that's so mixing, don't you think so? And I thought of Fletcher, for Papa, only Mr. Thompson was feeling a little bit hurt still on account of Papa's making such fun of Peregrine—and there was Warren, for Father Thompson, but that would have hurt Papa's feelings, so we finally decided on Dunham—I think Dunham Thompson makes a dignified combination, don't you? Not that he gets it very often, his daddy always speaks of him as 'the boy', and Mama and Mother Thompson never call him anything but 'Baby'. You never met Mother Thompson, did you, Mrs. Bellamy? I'm just devoted to her, she's the most exquisite little old lady, very like Kenneth, with a face just like a cameo——”

“How gruesome!” boomed Miss Archibald unexpectedly. “Has she had anything done about it? Or does she exhibit herself? Here come the men —do tell them about it. Listen, all of you! Mrs. Thompson is telling us the most revoltingly fascinating tale about a woman she knows with a face like a camel!”

Kenneth gazed aghast at his Ada; he had seen her down-turned wine-glass at supper, but could she have forgotten herself with the liqueurs? He wished that the Bakers would come: he was ready to go, particularly as Dr. Bellamy, who seemed the only

entirely sane person present, came back from a telephone call to say that he had been sent for by a patient, and must leave them. He set himself to grim endurance of the rest of the evening, until his wife's audible wonderings as to what could be keeping the Bakers so long were answered by the tooting of their motor-horn at the door.

"I loved your little man, Marigold," said Miss Archibald, after the Thompsons had gone. "Because it was plain to be seen that I thrilled him, and it's been so long since I've caused any one to thrill —except your footman to-night, Hugo, I caused him to thrill with horror! I'm going now—such stars you never saw! I'm going to tramp under them for miles, and probably lie on an open hill-top, *a la belle étoile*, if the insects aren't too bad."

"Not in a lace tea-gown!"

"Certainly—I have on walking boots, and I turn up the tail of my dress for a shawl. It's as warm as toast to-night, anyway. I can't face another struggle with that embroidery frame, Hugo—you just bring it when you come, and drop it at the lodge, will you?"

"Certainly not, I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing," Hugo called after his aunt's retreating form. Then he came back to where Marigold was sitting.

CHAPTER XXI

TELLING THE TRUTH TO GEORGE

MARIGOLD wished that Hugo had gone, too, or that George would come home. She was tired, and just a bit apprehensive of Hugo's farewells. But he seemed quite safe and natural as he sat down beside her on the big sofa.

"Oh, Marigold, what a fearful party—cigarette? That obscene woman who insisted on telling me all about her husband's entrails, and yet had the effrontery to look shocked when I called her 'my dear'—inadvertently, I need not add. And Aunt with red and purple embroidery silk hanging out of the corners of her mouth, like a mandarin's moustache. No wonder you look exhausted. You're as white as a little ghost. Don't talk, just rest. Shall I play to you?" He went over to the piano, and began to play an air full of passionate melancholy, and presently sang to it:

" 'Dejame, memoria triste,
Nò me estas atormentando
Se la quise o nò la quise,
Nina de mi corazon—'"

“What does it mean?” asked Marigold obligingly.

“It’s a Petenera—a Spanish gypsy song, very old. There are English words—I’ll sing them to you.”

She thought to herself: “That’s Hugo all over! Singing Spanish folk-songs! I wish just for *once* he’d sing ‘Alimony Blues’ or ‘Mammy’, but I suppose it would kill him.” She got up, and went out on the porch. The air was drenched with the scent of lilacs, and the sky was powdered with stars. She wished, idly, that Hugo would go, and George would come home. She wanted to laugh over the ridiculous supper party with him. Running beneath the surface of her thoughts was the consciousness of how she must look to Hugo through the French window: shining faintly in lamplight and starlight against the dark background of pine-trees and night.

He was singing:

“ ‘Leave me, memory of sorrow,
Come not, torturing me sore;
Whether once, or not, I loved her,
(*Child and darling of my heart!*)
Whether once, or not, I loved her,
Do not thou remind me more.’ ”*

Softly singing, “ ‘*Nina de mi corazon,*’ ” he came out, and sat beside her on the broad railing of the

* From “Spanish and Italian Folk-Songs,” translated by Alma Strettell.

porch, picking up a silvery ribbon of her gown, and running it through his fingers.

“What stars! Look at them through the pine-branches. To-morrow I’ll be gone—miss me a little, Marigold.”

“Indeed I will, Hugo—we both will.”

“We both will!” Even your thoughts of me must be chaperoned by George!”

He bent his head, watching the shining ribbon that slipped through his fingers.

“When are you coming to Paris, Marigold?”

“I don’t know—George is so busy.”

“Why must you wait for him? Tell him you need a change, and come and visit my sister. She’d love you, and you and I could play together. We’d be two children—we’d do all the innocent heavenly things that children are too blasé to do—we’d watch the puppets—remember *Le Petit Cuignol*? ”

“Oh, don’t I! With the little red curtains jerking back!”

“We’d take a bottle of wine, and a long crusty loaf, and picnic in the woods, hidden among the ferns.”

“Oh, Hugo, you at a picnic! I can’t imagine that! You hate them.”

“I hate hard-boiled eggs and paper napkins and more than two people—oh, how I hate more than two people, anywhere, ever! To-night, for instance—ghastly!”

“You’re being rude about my party.”

“I’m being truthful about it. Never mind, it’s over, thank God; and now I have you to myself for one little hour before we say good-bye.”

“I’m afraid it mustn’t be even the littlest hour, Hugo—I heard your stable clock strike eleven a long time ago,” said Marigold primly; but Hugo paid no attention to her remark.

“Come to Paris, Marigold! Think of the little boys in their black smocks! Think of the chestnut trees in bloom! Think of the scent of wall-flowers! Won’t you come?”

“Hugo, you know I can’t. George can’t get away just now, and I couldn’t leave him.”

“Why not? He wouldn’t miss you much—not for one summer. Haven’t I seen how often you’ve been left alone? You don’t think for a moment that you or any one could really matter to George while he has his work, do you? Poor little Marigold!”

“You mustn’t talk that way, Hugo. I’m a very happy woman.”

“You’re a very gallant liar! Do you think I see nothing? I saw the look in your eyes when George left you to-night with hardly a word.”

“Oh, Hugo! That’s George’s way! When he speaks to me in front of other people he always acts as if he weren’t quite sure whether we’d been introduced or not.

“I can’t think of you—you, like a flower, like a

rainbow—settling down to be a country doctor's wife. Settling down. Heavy, heavy. With your thistle-down thoughts turning into so many boiled puddings——”

“I'm happy, Hugo. I'm satisfied.”

Her words were true, but the tone of her voice was a farewell to youth, to love, to hope. When had Marigold failed to respond to the suggestion of interesting unhappiness? A rainbow—a flower—and the rainbow must fade, the flower must perish. Good-bye, oh good-bye!

The suggestion of boiled puddings was less delightful.

“*Toujours le beau geste!*” Hugo said.

She looked at him, through her lashes. She thought, with a not altogether unpleasurable feeling of panic:

“Something generally happens when they begin to get like that—when they breathe hard through their noses and their shirts begin to creak. I'd better try to make him go home.” She got up. “I'm cold. I'm going in.”

He caught her hand, and said, in a strange voice that she had never heard before:

“I'd give my life to take you with me.”

Startled, she tried to pull herself away, but he held her fast as his words came pouring out.

“I love you—do you understand? I love you. I didn't want to—it's a damned mess. But I saw

how unhappy you were—how lonely—beautiful—and you love me—don't you? Don't you?"

For one astounded moment she broke away from him. Could this be Hugo—Hugo, always languorous, calm, tidy in his emotions as in his dress? She caught a glimpse of his feet, and thought, incongruously, how neat and small they looked in their evening slippers. Then he had her in his arms again, and was fastening hard, hot lips on her mouth.

Mrs. Marshall was taking care of her grandchildren while her daughter and son-in-law were in New York for a week, and as she gave them their baths that evening, it seemed to her that Junior was rather feverish. Also, a slight rash might or might not be the indication of something that little Sister could catch; so she telephoned Dr. Bellamy to come and look him over.

The rash and the fever proved to be nothing more serious than the result of too many sweets, administered by an indulgent grandmother, and the hot, cross little boy was comfortable and sleepy before George left him and came downstairs to give a few instructions to Mrs. Marshall.

She did not hear what he was saying as she waited for his voice to stop. She had resolved to tell him that people were talking about his wife, and her heart pounded with excitement. She believed that Marigold had taken Donald Boynton away from her own

daughter Dorothy: she knew that Dorothy had suffered, and now she was going to make Marigold suffer.

People were apt to describe Mrs. Marshall "as "motherly-looking". She always looked smooth and bland; her full face was calm beneath bands of whitey-yellow hair; her plump smooth hands with their big pale freckles, were generally busy mending little frocks, or knitting small jackets; her broad bosom, swelling smoothly under lace and dark silk, looked as if tired heads could rest there. Only her eyes, turning this way and that behind blinking lids with short whitish lashes, and the tip of her tongue, constantly licking her lips, suggested something lurking behind that smooth, pleasant exterior. In a voice like honey she continually denied the most scandalous things about her acquaintances—things that nobody had ever heard of until they were so charitably denied by Mrs. Marshall. Her voice was smooth and sweet now, but with a little nervous quiver in it, as she said:

"I know you're the busiest man in town, Doctor, but I wonder if you could spare me just one little tiny minute—there's something that's been terribly on my mind for some time, that you could help me about. Come into the sitting-room—don't step on Junior's little choo-choo, it might give you a bad fall! The children's things are all *over*—their mother says I spoil them, and I guess I do, but what else are grandmas good for, I'd like to know?"

She gathered a doll, a cotton rabbit, a muslin copy of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears", and parts of a toy tea-set from the Morris-chair, and motioned him to it.

"I'll tell you my problem without beating around the bush, Dr. Bellamy. That's always the best way, after all, isn't it? Now, I have a dear little friend who's getting herself terribly talked about. She's a dear, sweet little girl, at heart, with a fine splendid husband, and everything to make her happy, but she's going with another man so that every one in town is talking. Now *I* know this little girl has a heart of gold, but some others don't know her as well as I do, and you know how people just *love* to think the worst of any one—it's a sad thing, but they *do*. Now, what ought *I* to do? Some one ought to be a true enough friend to that dear little girl or her husband to tell them how things look to people who don't *know* her. It's really wrong to let that little thing go on so recklessly. What ought *I* to do, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to decide that for yourself, Mrs. Marshall," George said, getting up. "If it was chicken-pox or a broken leg, perhaps I could advise you, but this is beyond me. Sorry. Give the little boy the other powder in the morning, and let me know if he doesn't seem all right."

"Doctor—wait! Dr. Bellamy, maybe you think that other isn't any of your business—"

“I know it isn’t.”

“It’s just because I really do love her—and she’s so young, and you being so busy, naturally wouldn’t see what every one else in town has seen——”

“Who are you talking about?”

He looked dangerous, and Mrs. Marshall felt rather frightened as she answered, with a surge of perverse pleasure flooding through her fear:

“Surely you know, Dr. Bellamy—Marigold and Mr. Curry.”

She had gotten up, with a chair between herself and him. She hardly knew what he might do—throw something, perhaps, or take her by the throat. She felt terrified and exultant. He was standing, too; he picked up the children’s book from the table beside him, and turned over a page or two. It struck him that a picture of Goldilocks tasting the porridge suggested Marigold—his darling little Marigold.

Throwing the book down, he looked at Mrs. Marshall and laughed.

“Since you love her so much,” he said, “You’ll be glad to hear that there’s nothing in it. Too bad, if the town was getting any excitement from it, but I’m afraid you must tell your friends that there’s nothing in it at all.”

She looked at him, hating him, her tongue flickering out to lick her lips.

“You’re blind, Dr. Bellamy. People have seen

them together everywhere—lonely places—coming out of the woods towards dark—ask any one!"

"You're not worth talking to," said George.

He went out, and started for home. The rush of air in his face, delicately chill, the great sky, thick with stars above him, took away something of the smothered feeling he had had in Mrs. Marshall's room. He felt the need of a great bath—hot water, brushes, soap—to clean himself of the slime of dirty thoughts and whispers: he felt physically filthy from having listened to Mrs. Marshall's suspicions. His heart ached with love and tenderness for Marigold: he had subjected his own dear girl to this, by urging her to be friendly to Hugo, when she had not liked him. Now his one thought was to reach her, to make up to her by his adoration for the talk that she must never hear about.

Although it was late, the lights of his house shone clear and reassuring. She was sitting up for him. He leapt from the car, and ran across the lawn and up onto the porch.

Finding Marigold in Hugo's arms, his life turned to ashes. Fighting against the physical sickness that threatened to overcome him, he said, hearing his own voice far away:

"That's about enough."

Hugo turned. George said, lurching a little, like a drunken man:

“Get out—get out——!”

“George——!” said Marigold, in a sick whisper.

“Go with him if you want to,” he answered.

“By God, you’re right!” cried Hugo. “Come with me, Marigold!” But Marigold did not hear him: she was whispering her husband’s name, over and over again, desperately:

“George—George——”

“Come with me, Marigold. We love each other—come with me now, and I’ll make up to you for all this.”

“Oh, Hugo, go away!” she cried hysterically. “I wish I’d never seen you! I hate you! George, speak to me—George—forgive me—speak to me!”

Slowly he came up from the depths that had roared in his ears and blinded his eyes. Things grew clear again. He saw the pine-branches against the stars, smelled the lilacs, saw Hugo’s face, saw Marigold’s shining dress, and heard her desperate voice. He answered politely, trying to remember the right words, as if they were lines in a play:

“There’s nothing to forgive. You’ve always known you were free if you stopped loving me. If you love him, and if you’re unhappy with me, go with him.”

“No, no, no!”

George suddenly turned to Hugo. “I told you to get out,” he said.

“Good God, George, what do you expect? You leave a child alone, day after day, you neglect her for your work and your damned old book, leave her to occupy herself as best she can, never see that she’s breaking her heart, and then you’re surprised if she turns to some one who realizes that she’s a woman, not just a comfortable cushion for you when you condescend to bring home what’s left of yourself after you’ve spent everything that’s worth while. Why should she be happy with a blind man, a deaf man, you fool?”

“Is that true?” George asked Marigold. “Have you been unhappy?”

“No, *no*, George, I’ve been perfectly happy.”

“Marigold, don’t be afraid of him—tell him the truth, and then come with me.”

“George, make him go away,” she wailed.

“But you were unhappy—you did care for me.”

“I wasn’t—I didn’t—I was just pretending!”

Hugo, white to the lips, turned and went down the steps and across the lawn. Neither of them looked at him as he went. George said to Marigold, still in that distant, polite voice:

“You’d better come indoors. You’ll catch cold with your bare neck and arms.”

He followed her in through the window, locking it after them carefully, and then went from window to window, closing each one, and drawing the long red curtains. Marigold watched him as she

stood in the middle of the floor, her nervous fingers tearing the lace of her handkerchief, her lips forming mute words. Finishing the windows, he began to put out the lamps, still not looking at her, nor speaking. She called to him in agony:

“Let me tell you how it happened—let me explain—George, speak to me, or I’ll go crazy!”

“I don’t want to talk to-night,” he said: “It’s late, and I have a bad day ahead.”

She clung to his arm, imploring mutely, while tears poured down her face and stained her shining gown.

“Please, Marigold. I’m tired, and you’ll make yourself sick. Go up and wash your face and go to bed.”

“You must listen—even if I’d killed some one, I’d be allowed to speak—you must listen to me——”

With a gesture of weariness, he sat down.

“No matter how things seem, I love you—I’ve never stopped for a second, and I never can stop. And you’ve made me happy—*happy*. But what happened to-night was my fault. I let Hugo think I was unhappy, just to make myself interesting to him. I’ve done that all my life—pretended, and lied—the only real thing, the only thing that is every scrap true, is my love for you. Everything else has had pretence mixed in it, but that has been all real. Try to believe me, George. I never cared

anything for Hugo, and I didn't really think he cared for me until to-night——”

“Is this the first time he's kissed you?”

“No,” she answered, with an effort.

“When before?”

“In the autumn.”

“And you've let him hang around ever since then?”

“He never kissed me again until to-night, George. I wanted to tell you then, only—oh, I don't know why I didn't! But I was going to tell you about to-night. Truly I was!”

He turned his head from side to side, as if he were in physical pain. Pressing her hands close together, she prayed swiftly and silently:

“God, make me be truthful no matter what happens.” Aloud, she said:

“George, if I were sick and weak in my body you'd be sorry for me, and help me: but it's my soul. I haven't been able to help it—since I was a child. I used to lie about seeing angels and fairies, to make myself interesting. I always had to be acting. And I couldn't hurt people. It wasn't kindness and sweetness, it was just because I couldn't face unpleasantness. Anything to smooth things over, and make myself seem lovely. Everything bad that's ever happened to me has come from not being honest. I knew for ages that I didn't love Donald Boynton, but I pretended to him that

I did—I pretended wonderfully. And even when I was nearly dying of unhappiness, I used to get some pleasure out of looking forward and seeing myself as an unhappy wife, adored and unhappy and brave—that's what I'm like, George! Even when my posing had killed Don, I was able to think how appealing I looked in mourning—I felt people looking at me, and imagined what they were saying. I even was able to wish I could wear a widow's bonnet, with white crêpe around my face—nothing touched me, nothing! Nothing was real except that I should be an attractive picture. I pretended to Mrs. Boynton that I still loved Don—I pretended to Hugo that I wasn't happy—just to be interesting, just to be what people wanted me to be! I saw myself with Hugo as if we were two people in a novel—it never seemed real for a minute. I thought of course he was pretending, too, until tonight. I meant to tell you a million times about his nonsense—and I thought it would make you laugh—make you laugh——”

She broke off, looking at his face and his eyes, that looked like the wide open eyes of a blind man.

“Are you hearing me, George?” she asked, laying a timid hand on his arm.

He got up, letting her hand drop, and began pacing up and down the room. Miss Archibald's embroidery frame stood in his way, but instead of

pushing it to one side, he carefully avoided it each time.

“Yes, I hear you,” he said.

“I’ve even pretended to God,” she went on. “I loved to genuflect and cross myself and all, in Church, when people were looking at me, and put on expressions when I was praying—oh, I’m sick at myself! But I’ve never posed for you, George—what you’ve had from me has all been real. I’m telling you the truth—I’m stripping myself naked for you—you must believe me. I meant to tell you about Hugo; I meant to tell you that Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Underhill came to Miss Archibald last winter to say people were talking about us. I was going to tell you everything to-night, although I don’t suppose you believe me, and I don’t know why you should. But even if I didn’t tell you, I’ve never pretended with you. I’ve loved you utterly. If you stop loving me, I’ll die. Tell me you forgive me.”

“I’ve told you that there’s nothing to forgive. Hugo was right, I left you too much to yourself. It isn’t your fault, it’s mine.”

“No, George, no! You’ve been perfect to me! Only say you believe me, and that we’ll be the same as before!”

“Stop crying, Marigold, and go to bed. I’ll be up soon.”

“Will everything be the same as it was before?”

"We're being two hysterical fools," he said. "What does it matter if Hugo kissed you? You're not the first woman who's been kissed by a man who wasn't her husband. I thought you were different. I thought of you as the one perfect soul in a rotten world. I thought we were so close together that we shared every thought and feeling. You've had all mine, and I've had what was comfortable for me to have of yours. It's all right. Don't think about it any more."

He lifted her grief-ravaged face, drained by despair, and kissed her kindly and quietly on the cheek. "Now you must go to bed," he said. "Stop crying—don't be a baby. Are the dining-room windows locked? All right, I'll see to them. Please go, Marigold."

On the stairs she waited, heard him go into the dining-room and fasten the windows, heard him pour himself out a drink, the decanter clattering against the tumbler. If she could only reach him, hidden somewhere behind that kind, quiet face and those blind eyes. Pressing her hands against her mouth to keep from crying, she went down a step or two: then, hopelessly, clinging to the stair rail, and moving slowly, like an old, old woman, she turned, and went upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER XXII

POSING FOR MARIGOLD

SHE lay staring into the darkness, shaken, now and then, by storms of weeping. She knew that George, too, was lying awake, but he spoke no word to comfort her. Into her tired brain, like bits of floating gossamer, came words from Hugo's song:

“Whether once, or not, I loved her,
(*Child and darling of my heart!*)
Whether once, or not, I loved her—”

She turned her hot pillow, wet with her tears. She thought of that afternoon in the orchard—the cold frail petals drifting down—George, his eyes in hers, his arms about her, his voice:

“*I love you, my precious. We're close together, aren't we?*”

She turned to her other side, pushing down the covers with hot hands.

“Whether once, or not, I loved her,
Do not thou remind me more.”

She did not sleep until the sun rose, and the birds were calling.

George did not waken her, as he usually did, but she heard him moving about in his dressing-room, and got up. She called to him timidly, but he did not hear. She bathed and dressed, putting on the first thing her fingers touched in her closet—a vivid frock of cherry-coloured print. She had worn it by the sea, and George had loved it against the grey of sky and water on dull days. To-day it made her face look chalk-white, but for once Marigold did not notice how she was looking.

George was half through breakfast when she came downstairs. He said good-morning, and pulled out her chair for her. She did not know whether to lift her face for his kiss, and while she was deciding, he went back to his place, and began to read the paper.

It was steadyng to say good-morning to Katie, to pour out George's coffee, and to give a corner of toast to Coco. These were things that belonged to every-day, cheerful life. If anything really dreadful had happened, they would have stopped. She looked through her lashes at George. He had put down his paper, and was drinking his coffee; his face was still the face of a kind stranger, his eyes were covered by lowered lids. His voice, when he presently spoke to her of one or two unimportant things, was reserved, the voice in which she had heard him speak to outsiders: no secret understanding rang in it.

“Please ask William to spray the currant-bushes to-day, Marigold.”

“Yes, George.”

“I may be late to dinner—don’t wait for me.”

“All right.”

He said kindly, kissing her good-bye as he might have kissed his aunt:

“Keep out-of-doors as much as you can—it’s a beautiful day.”

“George——!”

“Yes? I’m in a hurry, Marigold.”

She let him go. Turning back into the house, she could not believe that everything could still look just as it had yesterday. In the hall were George’s hats and sticks, and her own big garden hat; the great blue and white bowls full of dried rose petals, pungent and sweet; and Coco, paws delicately crossed, napping in the sunshine. The living-room had been set in order, but Miss Archibald’s embroidery frame still occupied the hearth-rug, and Hugo’s forgotten cigarette-case lay on the table. The flowers whose arrangement he had praised were fresh in their vases, but she pulled them out, with a reckless spatter of water: there must be as little as possible to remind George of yesterday, when he came home to-night. She went down to the orchard to gather boughs of apple-blossom—George loved them. The great sky was high and shining blue, with dazzling white clouds billow-

ing across it: the wind whipped her bright frock about her, and tumbled her silver-gilt hair. Birds tossed in the air, shouting their songs, and the apple-trees were silver fountains of bloom.

She had ordered the dishes that George liked best, for dinner, gathered little nosegays of violets for the finger-bowls, and dressed in his favourite frock, after trying to improve the appearance of her swollen eyes by applications of ice and hot water; so that it was unfortunate that he was detained at the hospital, and had only time for milk and biscuit there. Katie took the message at the telephone, as Dr. Bellamy said it was not necessary to disturb Mrs. Bellamy. They had a fine dinner in the kitchen that night.

George was careful not to leave Marigold too much alone. He continually planned diversions for her, always with other friends. He was kind and considerate to her, and as far away from her in reality as the other end of the world. Trying to feel towards her as if nothing were wrong between them, his thoughts were turned to bitterness by drops of suspicion. He loved her desperately, but she was no longer the shining miracle, the crystal-clear vision of truth, that she had been. She felt that she was living with a stranger, and he, too, felt that she was strange to him. The girl he thought he knew so well, his dream come true, was gone—she had never been. All the time that he had thought they

were as truly one as two drops of water that have run together, she had been keeping from him an affair that had been common knowledge. How could he believe her any more? Her eyes had been just as clear and steady then as now, her clasp as close, her voice as sure. He remembered her saying: "I'm in you, and you're in me, like the seeds in an apple—like the flame in a lamp—only closer—we couldn't be apart ever again, could we?"

When she talked to him, she felt as if she were trying to talk his own language to a polite foreigner, who listened courteously, not quite understanding. It was as if she spoke fairly well, but never well enough to hide the fact that she was a stranger; she did not know the idiom.

She grew, in those days of spiritual loneliness, those nights when she lay crying for lost hands in the dark. For the first time in her life it was more important to Marigold to love than to be loved.

She suffered more for her husband's pain than for her own. That her beloved was in trouble, and she not able to comfort him, was her bitterest grief. It seemed to her, young and impatient and despairing, that there was no way out of the muddle she had made, as long as they lived.

As long as they lived! The words stayed in her mind, buzzing there like bees. She remembered what Hugo had said—that neither she nor anybody could really matter to George as long as he had

his work. If she were dead, he could be free again to give all of himself to his vocation. She had given him happiness, and taken it away again: but if she gave him freedom, she could never take back her gift.

There came a day when she walked slowly up and down the grass path between the pansies, her hands clasped before her, her head bent thoughtfully. It was clear to her that she must kill herself. It was the only thing she could do for her darling now. She must not wait, and weaken. She must kill herself to-day.

It was so clear that she felt no pain nor terror, nothing but acquiescence. She walked slowly up and down: the sun was warm on her bent head: there were so many pansies this year; their vivid faces printed themselves on her brain; mauve, with a white splotch, and a black splotch on that; yellow with black whiskers, bright in the sun.

Up and down, up and down. The beds needed weeding; she thought she must speak to William to-morrow, and then remembered there would be no to-morrow for her.

Half a split croquet ball lay by the side of the path. The stripe on it was white, and along the middle of the stripe crawled a lady-bug, like a tiny red and black coach traveling along a broad white highway. The scent of the sweetbrier came to her in warm gusts, and the sound of bells was blown to

her on the wind. The Church chimes, ringing for Sunday School. She must make up her mind how she would kill herself.

It was hard to think. Her brain felt numb. Walk up and down the path in the warm sun and look at the bright little pansies—the croquet ball—a sparrow taking a dust bath—small pale green globes in the cherry tree—the blue broken shell of a robin's egg. To-morrow you will be too far away to see them.

Up and down, up and down.

George must never guess that she had killed herself: it must seem like an accident. She made up her mind what to do. He had warned her so often of the danger of going out too far on the top of the high cliffs that hung above the river: the ground was treacherous in places. But he knew she sometimes went there with a book. She must take a book, and her old hat, and leave them there when she went plunging over, so that when they were found, George would never guess the truth. She would leave an apple, too. Suicides never left cheerful things like apples on the shore when they entered the dark sea. Her last gift to him must be perfect—there must be no tiniest clew to lead him to the truth.

The chimes came again, melancholy with distance, filling the sunny garden. She must hurry. They were ringing for eleven o'clock Church.

It nearly broke her heart not to be able to write George a word of good-bye. She stumbled into the house. Hurry, hurry, while she was still numb! If she began to feel, she could never do it.

For a moment she knelt by his chair, her face against its cool worn leather. "Dear God, please bless my George," she said, and kissed the arm where his hand had been.

She was sobbing as she gathered up her hat and her book and her apple. George would be home soon. She must hurry. She ran out of the house: Coco was after her, barking excitedly, expecting a game: when she tried to send him back, he would crouch down, quivering with delight, and then dart away. The glorious day had gone to the old dog's head. She got him into the house at last, and he tried to lick the tears from her face as she said good-bye.

She had happened to wear the cherry-coloured print again to-day. As she ran under the splendid blue crystal of the sky, through the green-gold meadow with its patches of foam-white daisies, she looked like all of Summer's rapture concentrated in one slender vivid figure.

Through the meadow, through the wood; plunging on and on, tripping over roots, her face whipped by branches, her dress torn by briars; at last she came out on the clearing on the top of the cliff, overhanging the river.

In spite of herself, she paused. She had meant to plunge over without giving herself time to think, but her feet turned to lead. She crawled closer to the edge, and looked over.

She was on a ledge that stood out from the face of the cliff. Underneath were rocks and shale, and little pinetrees curving out to the river. She was so high that the pinetrees looked as tiny as the bits of green painted sponge in Noah's Arks.

She threw over a stone. It went bounding and tinkling down.

All at once she knew that she had never really meant to kill herself. She had yielded to a voluptuous despair, pacing in the garden, saying good-bye in her heart to George: but now she knew she could not kill herself. It had been another of her poses, a melodramatic play to her own gallery. Life flooded back to her, brilliant with sunlight, throbbing and trembling with bird calls. Somehow, things would come all right again, in time. Laughing and crying together, she said aloud absurdly: "I can go home to lunch!" She remembered that they were to have the first peas from the garden. She thought of green peas, of bread and butter, of forks, and spoons, and Katie's broad red face—enchantingly reassuring things after her terror and despair.

And George! She would see him again, talk with him, touch him, lie in his arms. How could she

have thought that she could leave him? George, who was light and air, George, who was God to her.

Trembling all over in her reaction, she went back into the woods, away from the sight of the river, and lay down on the moss by the clear pouring of the little brook. She felt too spent ever to move again. She lay watching a white butterfly floating and quivering above her, and finally disappearing among the trees. Tears of relief poured down her cheeks as she whispered her husband's name.

She felt as if life had been given back to her after she had lost it; as if she had died, and risen again from the grave. With tears and prayers she made her solemn resolution never, never again to speak or act anything but the truth, so long as she lived. She was done with pose and pretence: she would never again indulge in even the mildest play to the gallery. When she pretended, she not only hurt herself, but hurt most bitterly those who were nearest to her. Because she had pretended, Donald was dead: Hugo (she thought with sad elation) broken-hearted—or, at least, she supposed he was: George hurt beyond healing.

If only, on that dreadful evening, he had returned ten minutes earlier, when he would have found a decorous lady and gentleman talking about the flowering chestnut trees of Paris: or ten minutes later, when he would have found the lady, still a trifle breathless, but quite alone! In either case,

they would have lived happily ever after. Of course she would have told him that Hugo had kissed her; but seeing a thing happen and hearing about it are so different: particularly when the person who does the telling has had time to realize how uselessly painful some of the narrative would be.

But he had seen, and probably he would never love her again with that shining splendour, that perfect completeness, that they had known. Well, she must face that. She had done wrong, and she must atone for it. She thought of noble ladies who had sinned and suffered, and, taking the veil, had done penance all the rest of their lives, bringing blessing and brightness to the sick and poor, or, their lovely faces forever hidden from the world, had prayed without ceasing before the Crucifix. She could not go into a convent. She must stay in the world, facing "the long littleness of life"; but in her heart she could be a *rélégieuse*. If the one heart she loved no longer needed her, there were other sad hearts that she could comfort.

She might have all her dresses made of grey—or misty blue, perhaps—something like a nun's habit, plain and simple; she was tired of vanities.

She would begin her new life that afternoon, by taking in a basket of pansies to Miss Messie Hall, who had hurt her foot. Or perhaps a basket of peas would be better, although less picturesque.

She got up, and walked slowly out of the wood and through the meadow. George, who had come home, and wanted his lunch, came down through the orchard to look for her. He caught sight of her scarlet dress, with the white foam of daisies breaking against it. The sun was bright on her shining, wind-ruffled hair, and she loitered, pensively eating the apple she had taken with her to give a natural look to her death. His heart gave a great throb of tenderness: after all, she was still such a child! He called her name, and waved his hand to her.

Looking up, she returned his salutation, but a little absently: her eyes were dazzled for the moment by a vision of herself, in mist-blue robes, kneeling before a dim Altar: brave, broken-hearted, and not without a wistful beauty.

THE END



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